



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

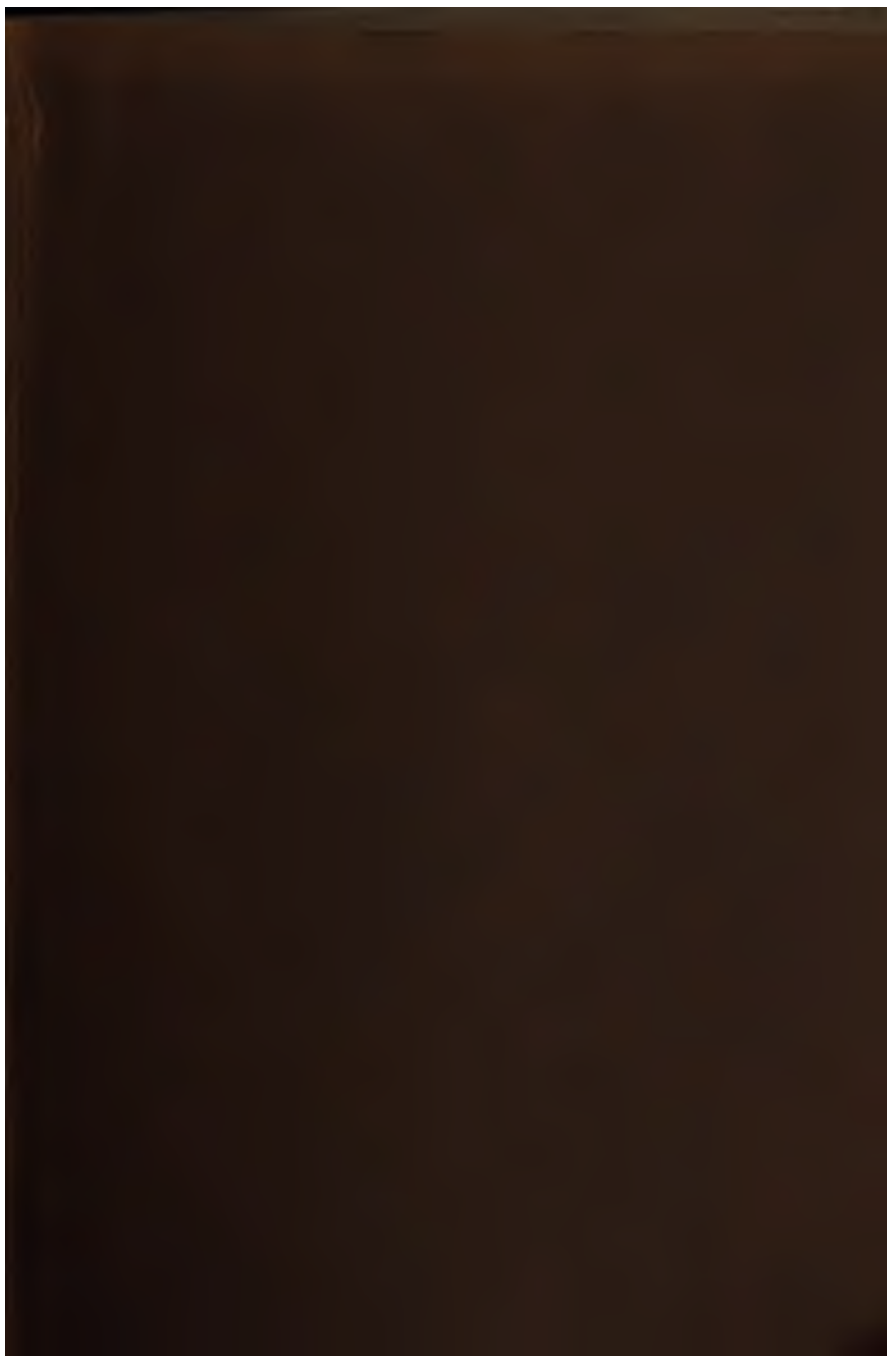
### About Google Book Search

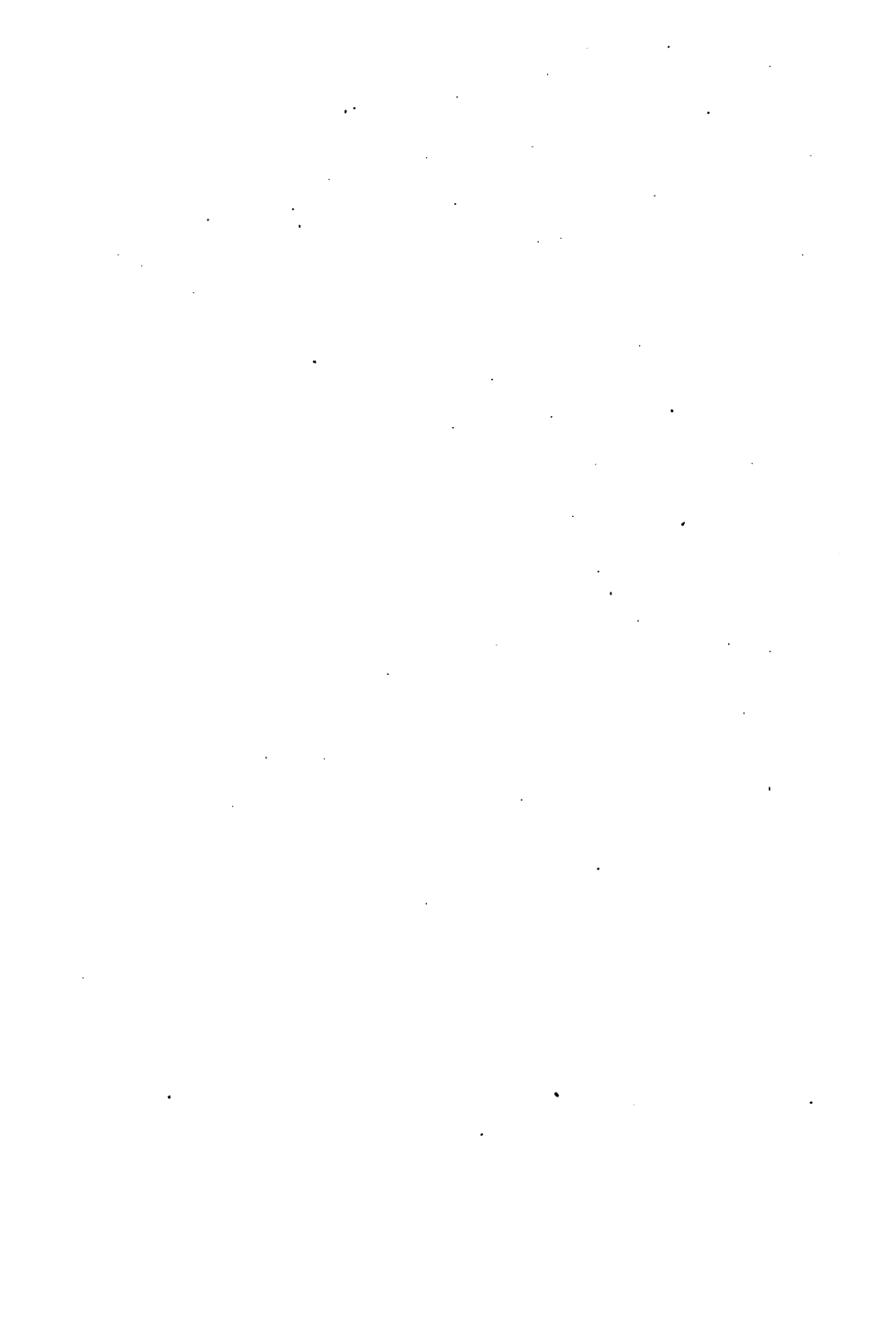
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



600060927U







# LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE,"  
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. II.

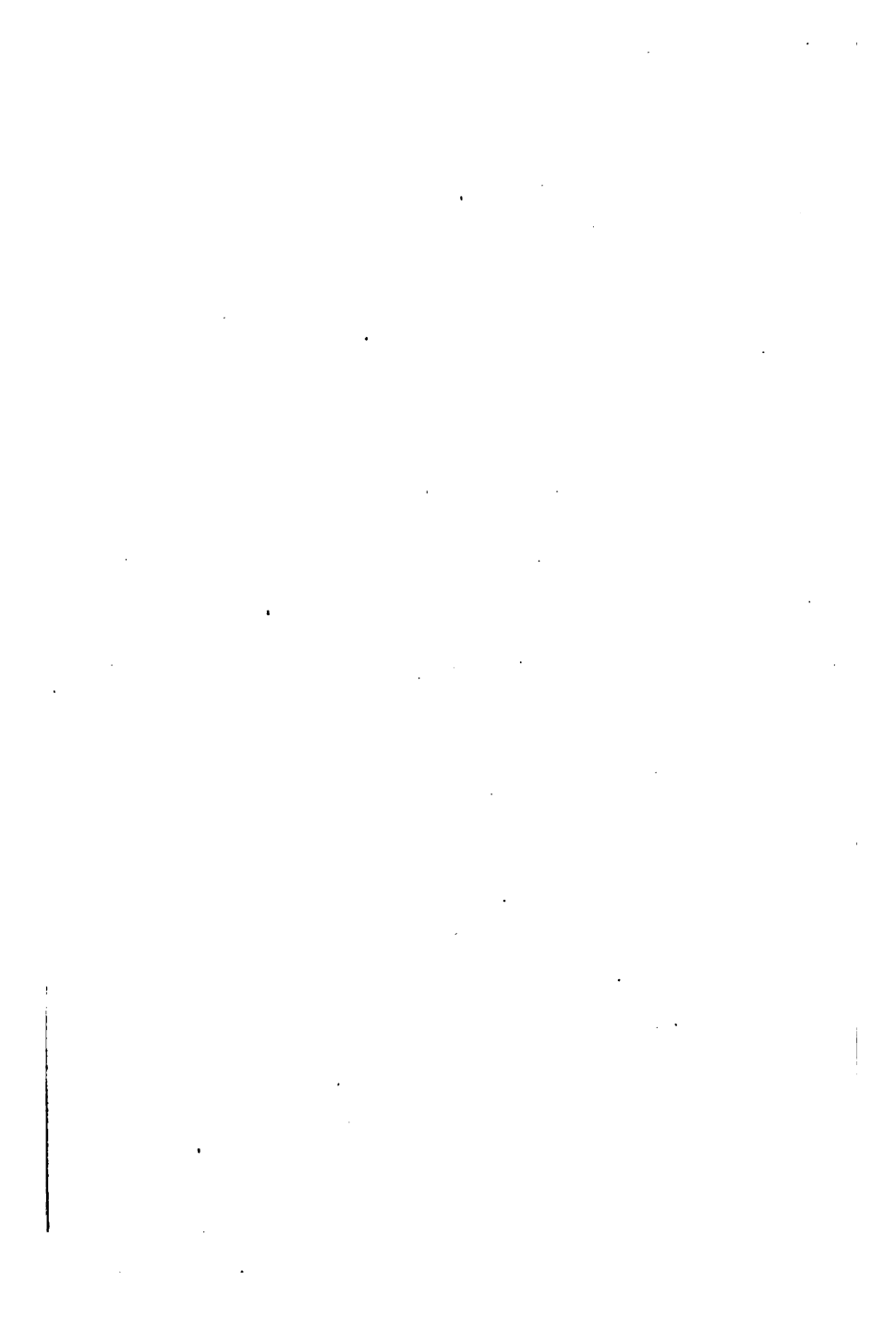


LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1874.

(All Rights Reserved.)

251 *h* 337



## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DOUBLE-DEALING . . . . .	I
II. THE BEHEMOTH MEANS MISCHIEF . . . . .	28
III. A SAD CHAPTER . . . . .	45
IV. AT PIRATE'S POST . . . . .	63
V. WHAT THE BEHEMOTH MEANT . . . . .	92
VI. MR. GOODEVE'S RETURN HOME . . . . .	112
VII. SIR FREDERICK'S WOOING . . . . .	134
VIII. IN JEKYL STREET . . . . .	158
IX. IN WHICH THE BLINDS ARE DRAWN DOWN . . . . .	177
X. DUST TO DUST . . . . .	197
XI. CONCERNING THE WILL . . . . .	211
XII. A CHAPTER OF POLICE . . . . .	230
XIII. HEIR-AT-LAW . . . . .	254
XIV. TWO FAIR OFFERS . . . . .	272





# LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### DOUBLE-DEALING.



MR FREDERICK DASHWOOD was bad enough, as he admitted freely in his now more frequent self-communings, even according to the vicious code which prevails among the wildest men of so-called pleasure. It is probable that had the Accusing Angel suddenly appeared, in one of those companies of gamblers and profligates which the baronet was wont to frequent, ready to recount with trumpet-tongue the hidden misdeeds of all the revellers

there, most of those present would have shrunk from one another, like the wretches in Beckford's Hall of Eblis. But Dashwood well knew that they would have recoiled from *him*, as from the noisome breath of the plague, though once he had laid to his soul the flattering unction that he was no worse than very many who die in the odour of respectability, and whose mortuary tablets give them credit for every virtue that can be practised beneath the sun. Yet the man was not all bad. There were moments when his unquiet spirit groped, as it were, through the mists of vice and ignorance, in a vague search for something better, much as some blind monster might struggle through mud and weed, piteously seeking for something which its sightless eyes were now impotent to discern. He had been so untaught, so misled by evil example, so cast away from the threshold of manhood until now! What did he know, beyond company drill and garrison routine, except how to

handle the reins, to play a good game at pyramids, to ride a steeple-chase! Everything and everybody seemed to have combined to impress upon him the advantages of rank and riches, and the charms of worldly pleasure, and that Brazen Rule of getting all one can, and keeping all one gets, which has been irreverently styled the Eleventh Commandment. It was not wonderful that he had "gone to the bad," as an apt pupil in such a school.

But there was That in Dashwood's memory which, like a familiar demon, never suffered itself to be long forgotten, putting in a reminder when his mirth was high, and brooding at his elbow in the dark hour of hazy remorse. Once it had been, like what sailors call the Eye of a hurricane in the tropics, a mere handbreadth of dark cloud, a speck in the turquoise blue of the pure summer sky. Now it had grown, and grew, a threatening blackness that would not allow him to forget. He had his punish-

ment already, on this earth of ours, for all that he could hold up his head still among men.

He was going down again to Richmond, to Richmond and to the Fountains on a different errand. It is possible, as the gay and gallant Captain Macheath discovered, to have too much of even so agreeable an occupation as that of making love, and to find two beloved objects worse than none at all. Sir Frederick had a very delicate game to play. To marry Beatrice might be the sheet-anchor that would save him from utter beggary. That, at best, was an uncertainty. That Beatrice did not love him, he was aware. That she had a girlish fancy for somebody else was, he considered, probable. He had, however, a firm reliance on the binding efficacy of the promise which, on so solemn an occasion, her dead mother had extorted, and on Beatrice's submissiveness to her mother's often expressed wish that the cousins

should marry. The dowager was the disturbing element in these venal calculations. Lady Livingston had always disliked Fred Dashwood. She had, it is true, been peculiarly indulgent towards the titled scapegrace since he had returned from Canada, but then there had been something suspicious in the very abruptness of the change. The old peeress was not old enough to be in her second childhood, or to evince that doting affection towards those previously detested, which is sometimes observed in extreme age. And unless the inheritance were quite secure, Dashwood would care but little to call Beatrice his wife.

Then there was Violet Maybrook—Violet with her flashing eyes, her royal beauty, her untamable spirit] chafing] against restraint, not a woman to allow herself to be lightly thrown off for the sake of a better-dowered rival. So far as the man had preserved the capacity of loving, he did love Violet. Had he been rich and free, and

had she been beside him to claim the fulfilment of his pledges of old time, probably he would have kept his word with reasonable alacrity. But that induration of the heart that comes from an ill-spent life, does not leave many soft spots on which the gentle emotions can fasten. Some sparks of grace, of goodness, and of mercy, linger with the worst of us, at all events, until an inpenitent old age has set its seal upon an evil youth and reckless prime. But so few are the precious embers of a hallowed fire long died out, that their pale gleam seldom irradiates the darkness. We may grant some compassion to such as Sir Frederick Dashwood, men who can love but a little, who can pity but for an instant, who snatch, as it were, but a momentary glimpse of the Promised Eden where sin and sorrow cannot enter, far, far away!

"My lady is not so well to-day, Sir Frederick," said the softly-shod butler at the Fountains. "I am not sure whether

her ladyship will be able to see you. Miss Beatrice is with my lady, upstairs. There is no one in the drawing-room except Miss Maybrook."

"Nothing could be better!" muttered Dashwood, as he followed this silent-footed attendant to the well-known yellow saloon, where, as the butler had correctly stated, the dowager's companion was alone, Lady Livingston, among her other peculiarities, being impatient, in moments of sickness, of any society but that of those whom she loved.

"Look here, Violet," said the baronet eagerly, so soon as they were left alone. "We are in the same boat, my girl, and must sink or swim together. You said as much the other day, and it was better put; but so it is, anyhow. Well, I scraped together as much as contented the she-vampire yonder, this charming importation from the colonies; but she had only told you, it seems, of one of her demands. She didn't say, did

she, that she must be allowed to teach music ?”

“To teach music—here ?” echoed Violet, in surprise.

“Ah, just so,” returned Sir Frederick : “she does make that a stipulation, and sticks to it with such bulldog tenacity that I was forced into giving her a promise in writing that I would manage it. Don’t look so alarmed. She’ll keep a quiet tongue, for her own sake ; but you must talk over Miss Fleming, my Cousin Beatrice, who is to be the pupil, of course, and she must persuade the dowager. I leave it to you whether you had better mention this girl’s real name, or the assumed one which she bears in London. It is a thousand to one against your having breathed the word Larpent in this house.

“Yes, I have,” answered Violet slowly. “When I arrived here, your cousin, or the dowager—I forget which—asked me who was my instructor in singing, and I did



mention the name of yonder viper. It never answers to rely on the blankness of other people's memories, old or young. I must introduce her as one I have known before, and as an old schoolmate, if I am to do so at all, and the fewer falsehoods the safer!"

"Well, I suppose you are right there," rejoined Dashwood disconsolately. He was not himself one of those artists in fiction whom we occasionally meet with, and who mispend their ingenuity in weaving webs more subtle than those of the spider, gossamer textures that a touch can brush away. But, as some bad men do, he credited women with a perverse power of making the thing that is appear as if it were not, and esteemed himself hardly used because Miss Maybrook had not a cut-and-dried romance, in which Aphy should be the central figure, ready to be imposed upon the credulity of her employer.

"You can answer for my Cousin Beatrice, can you not?" he said, after a brief silence; "at least, I should hope so! She has only to ask and to have, here. One would think she had bewitched the old woman, sure as she is, too, of every acre of stiff clay, and every sixpence of the consols."

"The thought of Lady Livingston's succession haunts you like a phantom," said Violet, scorn in her burning eyes, scorn in her ringing voice. "We who were born in the New World have at least this merit, that we are not taught from the cradle to the coffin to hanker after an inheritance, and to crave and hunger for the spoils of dead men, who have the ill luck to be akin to us. No! We carve out our own fortunes with the strong arm and the thoughtful brain, or live contentedly on the fruits of honest labour. You it was, Frederick, who first taught me to be ambitious—and see to what a point that perilous guide has brought us! It would

be better for a man to toil among rude gold-diggers in the gulches of the Sierra Nevada, than to drag on such a life as yours, or, for that matter, as my own!"

"You look prettier, by Jove! when your eyes flash in that way, and your grand manner becomes you well," said Dashwood, lazily leaning back in his chair, to watch her as she stood, upright and graceful as a sapling pine, beside the massive chimney-piece. "I sometimes think, do you know, that not having chanced to be born a real queen, your true vocation would have been the stage!"

Violet coloured, and bit her lip in impatient anger. It was his habit, in some of his moods, to provoke her to wrath by an affectation of polished cynicism—which was perhaps of all qualities the most distasteful to such a nature as hers. But he never cared to push matters far enough to run the risk of a breach, which he had many reasons to avoid. "Come, come, Violet,"

he said more earnestly; "do not take my words amiss. My heart is heavy enough, if you did but know it, and I never felt less inclined for jesting. Can I rely on your managing, so that this importunate friend of ours in Great Eldon Street shall have her way? No need to bring my name into the discussion, of course."

"I will do what I can," said Violet, wearily, "thankless office though it be. To see her face and hear her voice in this house, will be to me as if I had evoked a ghost to haunt me—a ghost more terrible than the spectres that gibber, it is said, around the death-bed of a——"

She paused; and there was reason for her ceasing to speak, since Beatrice Fleming entered at the moment, with old Lady Livingstone leaning on her arm.

"Your coming has done me more good, you see, than Doublefee's visit!" said the Dowager, with somewhat of a sickly smile, as she held out three of her jewelled fin-

gers for Dashwood to take—she seldom gave her whole hand, save to her equals in age and station. “Sir Joseph found me altered, I could see, by the manner in which he pursed up his lips; though, of course, he was by far too much of the courtier to admit it. But I always feel better when you come, Fred.” And, oddly enough, this really did seem to be the case. The baronet had not, in the whole course of the long period for which he had known his aged kinswoman, appeared to stand so high in her good graces as since his return from Canada—a change which might more correctly be said to have dated from the day on which Mr. Goodeve, of Bedford Row, had brought down her ladyship’s will to Richmond for signature. There were moments when Sir Frederick was inclined to be sanguine as to the inferences which he drew from this remarkable coincidence. Persons of Lady Livingston’s time of life, and whose social consequence largely de-

pend upon their wealth, often, by insensible degrees, transfer to their heir a portion of the regard which they have been wont to entertain for the riches themselves. But Dashwood was, after all, too shrewd a student of character to permit any very fervent hope to be kindled in his bosom, so far as concerned his own chance of any legacy worth the having.

“No, no,” he would say, or rather think; “the old girl isn’t going to make my fortune, in that way, anyhow. A mourning-ring, or a bequest of a few pounds to buy one, may be scored up for my consolation when they bury her; that is all. Naturally, everything goes to Beatrice. The one bright spot in the sky is, that the dowager’s kindness seems to have some connection with the fact of my being attentive, and so forth, to my cousin—and if so, ought I not to strike in for such a prize, before the favourable wind veers round again! No doubt but that every acre and every sove-

reign will prove to be tied up as tightly as parchment can bind them, so that Beatrice's husband shall never make ducks and drakes of the principal; but even to be a rich wife's pensioner would be better than playing at hide-and-seek with my creditors—hang them! It's awkward, too, on Violet's account."

But Lady Livingston, in her novel benignity towards her prodigal relative, did something towards smoothing away the awkwardness which undoubtedly exists in paying particular attention to one lady-love under the eyes of another. Old ladies could give a lesson in finesse to any male diplomatist, so far, at least, as the management of girls and unmarried men is in question, and on this occasion the dowager manœuvred her pawns with the same triumphant dexterity which a veteran of the chequered board exhibits in deploying his mimic warriors in carved ivory. Sir Frederick—Freddy, for once, according to

the nomenclature of the day when the baronet was but a wilful child—must stay and dine, and cheer up that lonely household of moping women. He had half-cured the dowager's indisposition, by the sight of his good-for-nothing face, and must not leave the good work incomplete. Lady Livingston felt better, but not disposed to walk or drive; no, she would stay at home, and get quite strong by dinner-time; and Violet, dear Violet, should stop with her and read to her, while Sir Frederick and Miss Fleming strolled out together.

“You are cousins, after all, and saw each other very often when Frederick was still in a jacket, and you had better have a good chat over old times, and quarrel if you like—and make it up, as cousins should.”

Nevertheless, the old lady, as she watched Sir Frederick's retreating form, while he walked away towards the river, side by side with Beatrice, eyed him with the same quaint expression of amusement which had



lurked beneath her aspect of outward benevolence on the very day of the signing of the will. There seemed to be some grim joke, only intelligible at present to Lady Livingston herself, in the all but undisguised encouragement which she afforded to this insolvent suitor for the hand of her young relative.

The sentiments which Miss Fleming entertained towards her cousin were not of a nature to make her either seek or shrink from his society. She had never had a brother, and to brotherless girls a first-cousin, when no thought of Hymen's obtrusive torch comes in to mar the calm of consanguinity, is the nearest approach to one. As a child, she had been gratified by such notice as the handsome lad, of whose pranks and high spirit so much had drifted to her ears, vouchsafed to a little creature like herself. She could, then and later, have been very proud and fond of Fred Dashwood—as a brother. But then

had come the never-forgotten day when her dying mother, in pursuance of her darling project of bringing Beatrice and her cousin together, had joined the hands of the two young people, and had made them repeat after her the words of a solemn vow to be husband and wife. On Sir Frederick, this bond sat very lightly. His aunt, he told himself, had a craze, as some old women had, on the subject of match-making—and he had merely humoured her fancy at a time when to refuse would have seemed harsh. It was not thus, however, that the more sensitive conscience of Beatrice estimated the obligation she had incurred. To her thinking, she was bound by every tie of honour and of duty, if only he to whom she had been pledged chose to claim the fulfilment of the promise. Her love for her mother had been deep and warm, and hers was a character not easily deterred from doing what was right from any dislike to self-sacrifice. She had

given up Oswald Charlton, whom she did love, because of her engagement to Dashwood, whom she did not. But this was one of the cases in which there was room for crushed hopes to revive, so long as she continued to bear the name of Miss Fleming. As Lady Dashwood, the cup of wormwood would be almost too bitter; yet, if he to whom she conceived herself to belong chose to hold it to her reluctant lips, she would even drink of it.

Sir Frederick did not leave her very long in doubt of his intentions.

"Beatrice," he said, as they walked on along the path, bounded by sedges and bulrushes, through which the water gurgled as the flood-tide fell, while a brisk breeze stirred the surface of the river into a myriad of ripples bright as diamond facets in the winter sunlight, "I wish, dear, you could learn to like me just a little."

It was coming, then. She trembled very much, and then, with the blameless hypo-

crisy of her sex, she tried to return an in-different reply.

“So I do like you, Frederick; very much indeed,” she said.

The baronet turned upon her with a laugh of dubious purport.

“No fencing, Beatrice,” he said, roughly, “with an old hand like myself, please; and so we may skip all that cousinly affection and namby-pamby of that sort. You are not the girl I take you to be if you deny your own words, or refuse to be bound by them. And you are mine, in virtue of your solemn pledge; are you not?”

She had turned her face away, that he might not see the tears that now stood thickly in her eyes; and as he repeated the question, she uttered but an inarticulate sound by way of answer.

“And I love you, Beatrice, dear, and I will try to make you happy,” he said, catching at her hand; but she eluded his grasp, and walked on, somewhat faster than before, with her head bent down,

struggling hard to repress her sobs. "Don't you care for me at all?" he said, reproachfully, as he stooped forward so as to catch a glimpse of her tear-stained face.

"Not in that way," she answered, resolutely; "not so."

Now, Sir Frederick had never laid it down as part of his programme that Beatrice was to be romantically attached to him, and of a certainty he was no devoted lover; yet his vanity was piqued by this reply. Never mind!—such were his reflections—the day might come, when they were married, when his wife would learn to estimate the value of a kind word or a condescending caress. At present, he must humour her.

"Listen, my dear," he said, gently, "while I make my meaning clear. I am a poor man, and a disappointed one, as you have heard; and cares and annoyances chafe a fellow's temper, and make him but a blunt wooer; yet, for all that, I will try to be a

good husband to you, Beatrice, and to make you happy. It was my poor aunt's fondest wish, you remember that?"

"Yes; I remember." Her poor little lip quivered piteously as she stammered out that fatal assent.

He went on, conscious of his advantage: "And you have not forgotten when and how your promise was given that you would be my wife one day. Ever since then, I have regarded you as my own, pretty Beatrice! but I have not been urgent in laying claim to what was mine. Am I right to do so now?"

No answer.

"Come, dearest," he said, as he again grasped at her hand, and this time with success; "I must have a word from you—one little word—to make me happy; only 'Yes.'"

Beatrice tried to release her hand. "Oh Frederick, cousin—do be merciful to me!" she exclaimed, determining in her despera-

tion to try an appeal to his pity. "Don't ask me for what I cannot give—for the love which I have it not in my power to bestow. Be my friend, be my brother! and a more loving sister and true well-wisher never was, than I will prove myself to be; but be generous, and spare me!"

"One would think," said Sir Frederick, half nettled by the candour of this speech, "that I was a downright ogre, or something of that sort, that it would be sheer misery to marry. It certainly is not complimentary, this petition of yours, my dear. But you will learn to know me better, love, when we see more of one another; and it shall not be my fault, if I do not teach you to grow fond of me when you are my wife. At any rate, you acknowledge my claim, do you not?"

"Yes," she answered, tremulously—"yes. If you choose to take me, I am yours; but it is cruel—cruel!"

He laughed, and tried to clasp his arm

around her; but she shrank away from him. "Pretty, timid little flutterer!" he said, in his most winning tone; "how I wish I could tame you!" Dashwood's voice was naturally a rich and musical one, and certainly he had not allowed its persuasive powers to grow rusty for lack of practice; but Miss Fleming shuddered as she heard it, as if its accents had been the harsh cry of some bird of prey.

"Do not let there be any mistake about my sentiments," said she, earnestly; "I will be true to my plighted word, and will keep my promise. If you insist upon the fulfilment of the pledge, you shall have what you have a right to exact; and if it be your good pleasure to have an unloving and joyless bride to take her place beside you at the altar, even so let it be. Only, understand this clearly—that I submit because I am bound, but that, were I free, my choice would not fall upon——" She broke down, sobbing, and Dashwood, who



felt that he had gone far enough, did his best to console her.

"There, there, Beatrice," he said, releasing her hand, of which he had hitherto retained possession. "I never wanted to distress you, only the time had come when it was necessary that we should arrive at some understanding. Come! let us talk of something else. I will not tease you any more, and, indeed, there is no need for hurry: take your own time; and perhaps it would be as well to say nothing to Lady Livingston about our little conversation of to-day. I was abrupt, and I startled you; but I don't mean to press you unduly, or to tease you; so dry your eyes, dear girl, and let us walk on for a while in silence, if you prefer it. It would not suit your book, nor mine, to bring on an explanation and a fuss under this roof."

Lady Livingston said nothing, when the cousins returned from their walk, regarding her young kinswoman's paleness and the

evident depression of her spirits ; but it is possible that her conscience may have pricked her for having thrown Beatrice in the path of a suitor so manifestly distasteful to her ; for her manner towards Dashwood was more capricious than it had been of late. Violet, too, had probably been keen-sighted enough to draw her own deductions from the half-effaced traces of tears around Miss Fleming's eyes, for the cold pride of her ordinary bearing towards the baronet was more marked than it had previously been, and, altogether, Sir Frederick did not overmuch enjoy his evening at the Fountains.


"She does care for some one ; she as good as told me so," he reflected on his homeward journey that night ; "but what signifies a girl's fancy !" The indifference which Dashwood felt on the subject of Beatrice's possible preference for another was based on his estimate of her inability, should she but keep her promise, materially

---

to affect his happiness. Violet was of a different mould, and it was not without uneasiness that he remembered the last glance from those dark and burning eyes of hers, that seemed to haunt him in his sleep. Still, he slept ; for it is not always the best of us whose slumbers are the soundest.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BEHEMOTH MEANS MISCHIEF.

HE winter, short in itself, if only such wintry days as fell within the formal limits prescribed by the almanac be taken into account, but encroaching, as modern winters are apt to do, on the traditional season sacred to spring, wore itself away. At the Fountains, scanty change, outwardly at least, appeared to mark the gradual slipping away of weeks and months. But the homes which are in outward show the most serene, are not invariably the freest from carking care and smouldering passions; nor was Lady

Livingston's well-appointed abode an exception to the rule. Beatrice was far from happy, and it was seldom that her fair pure face was irradiated by the sunny smile which had once been so frequent. She had prolonged her visit to the dowager far beyond the limits originally designed for it. For, somehow, at Richmond, and under the eyes of her dragon-guardian, she felt herself safer than elsewhere from Dashwood's hateful suit, based as it was upon her own rash promise to be his. Her other memories were of a kind to afford her little relief. Oswald Charlton, after the day which had witnessed his fruitless proposals, came to the Fountains no more, and Beatrice told herself that he was doubtless learning to forget her, and that was better so, much better. But though she repeated this comforting assurance to herself a thousand and a thousand times again, the truth is that she drew little comfort from it. She could not

forget. Men, it might be, could more quickly efface a once-loved image from their hearts. She had heard as much, and perhaps it was very natural and proper, and Mr. Charlton would be much happier than if he had continued to set his hopes on one beyond his reach. Yet Beatrice knew that she feared this in her secret soul, not hoped it, and that she yearned for his presence with the unsatisfied longing of those who are all but despairing.

The dowager was herself becoming a little more fretful, and slightly less genial, perhaps, than when first Violet Maybrook became an inmate of her house. She talked less frequently about her health than it had been her custom to do ; but her physicians found her a more censorious and unmanageable patient than before, and old Sir Joseph Doublefee, in particular, bemoaned the hard exigencies of fashionable society which compelled him to go so far

to visit an influential invalid who launched so many darts of sarcasm at her doctor.

"I declare," said that veteran Æsculapius of the West End—"I declare I believe that old woman spends her time in devising disagreeable things to say to me the next visit I pay her. I felt, yesterday, nearer apoplexy in her company than I've done these two years."

For poor Sir Joseph had a number of weak points, moral and physical, which were tolerably well known amongst his lucrative professional connection, but which were oftener mentioned behind his broad back than when his rubicund face and silvery whiskers and moist twinkling eyes were brought to bear upon a noble valetudinarian.

Lastly, Violet Maybrook, although perhaps even more beautiful than when she first reached England, looked somewhat graver and sadder than she had ever done before. But she kept her secret well,

whatever was the hidden cause of care which followed her like her shadow ; and she continued to discharge the duties of her situation with a tact and cheerfulness that never failed her. As for Sir Frederick, he was indeed a frequent visitor at the Fountains, but he played his cards prudently, and did not persecute Beatrice by any overt display of attentions. Yet Miss Fleming was never easy in his presence. She felt, rather than knew, that there lurked under the bland indifference of Dashwood's manner a consciousness of power, founded on that sense of proprietorship which an "engaged" swain so often exhibits towards his betrothed. Had she known his whole history, or, if not quite the whole, a part, it is probable that she might have entertained some degree of sympathy with the unfortunate baronet. The hands of the world's great clock had not stood idle for Sir Frederick Dashwood. His difficulties had thickened around him,



and if there had been occasional gleams of broken sunshine to checker the gloom, these had but served to deepen by contrast the gathering blackness.

"Head and ears in debt," was the general verdict of those male gossips who are the oracles of club smoking-rooms; and indeed Dashwood himself, when in a thoughtful mood, was wont to liken himself to some strong swimmer who strains every muscle and sinew in the vain attempt to breast some swollen current. He was passing rapidly into that state of suspicious irritability in which men loathe the postman's startling knock, and eye every stranger askance, seeing duns, bailiffs, and executions everywhere.

He was not entirely destitute, although his supplies of ready money were intermittent and scanty. His grandfather's senile avarice had taken the not uncommon form of desperate speculation. The modern miser has only the rapacity of

the old hoarder of French crowns and broad gold double joes, not his tenacious hold upon tangible ringing specie. So Sir George, when he took to the good, old gentlemanly vice of thirsting after gain and gold, found his philosopher's stone in the share mart, and his powder of projection in the Stock Exchange, buying what was cheap, in hopes that every silvern sprat might bring in noble returns by the capture of an auriferous whale. Thus his grandson and heir found himself a creditor of the very queerest commonwealths and monarchs, holding stock of South American republics laid desolate by the torch and tomahawk of the bordering savage; or possessing promises to pay sanctioned by dethroned hospodars and fugitive kings of Araucania. There were shares, too, in docks never dug, and railroads unknown to *Bradshaw*, in companies (limited) that had not as yet attained to the dignity of a dividend, and in all sorts

of insolvent concerns, old and new. The brokers to whom these shaky securities were shewn had curtly pronounced them as unsaleable, except by weight, and to the buttermilk.

Yet there was a boxful of papers, of bonds, scrip, debentures, coupons, titles, and so forth, the shadow, so to speak, of the substantial fortune of Sir George Dashwood, the very mention of which inspired creditors with a sort of respect for the broken-down baronet who was so deep in their books. There was a chance of that, to use the words of more than one of these worthy tradesmen, "out of so many irons in the fire some might get hot." War, revolution, and commerce effect such semi-miracles, that it was possible that several of the medical investor's wild purchases might prove remunerative. The faction of the Blacks or Reds, long suppressed by summary shooting and pillage, might again come to rule the wealthy states of Platina

del Douro, might keep faith with old lenders, and send up Platina stock to above par. The Prince of Poyais might come back. Cotton, gold mines, or an international canal, might convert Lonely River into a Pactolus.

He was a baronet too, and that had weight with those who held him in the hollow of their hand, and who, by legal process, might on any day have qualified him for the casual ward of a metropolitan workhouse. There are many who exist on sufferance, flickering tapers that a puff could extinguish, but that flicker on undisturbed. And this holds true of all, or of most, classes of society. We admire the bronzed boatman, his black whiskers lightly tipped with silver gray, putting out to sea, in the old smack, with its picturesque ruddy sail, patched, but workmanlike, his stalwart giants of sons beside him, and a brave little curly-headed water-baby of a boy, exhibiting such playful importance as

he hauls the heavy heap of nets forward, or "bears a hand" at the sheet.

"I could sell him up to-morrow," is the soliloquy of some bent old man with narrow chest and close-buttoned coat, who stands watching the mackerel fisher's departure with keen eyes that peer from under grizzled brows.

A smart fellow, yonder bright-eyed artisan, who earns ever so much a day, four times a week, and who is rather an artist than a mechanic, so deftly do his dexterous fingers subdue tough bronze, or clumsy iron, or stubborn clay, into submission. But he also exists, and makes and spends, by the kind permission of tallyman or loan office, precisely as does solemn, fair-haired Captain Heaviswell, driving his well-horsed drag, as if to hold the reins were a religious duty, carry on the war by the tolerance of some dozen persons who could extinguish him in an instant. It is an advantage, in such cases,

to have a handle to one's name, and Sir Frederick's did him good service, but yet he was sorely tried.

Mr. Longtick, managing partner of Longtick and Sons, the well-known army tailors, of Bowler Street, Mayfair, was the man whom he feared the most. There are tailors and tailors, and these especial ones were of the good old breed, honey to the fresh young palate, but with an awkward aftertaste of gall for the jaded and world-weary. They were patient traffickers, very patient. Prompt payments they gently but firmly deprecated, as they would a demand for vulgar discount on a tender of cash. They could wait, and the bill could swell; and if high mettled youngsters, military or civilian, wanted jewellery, wine, or even a little cash, the gentlest compulsion induced the firm to include such supplies among the coats and trousers, the swords, shakoes, gold-laced caps, feathers, fripperies, and other articles of

their lengthy account. But there was a fearful reckoning in store for the chubby-cheeked young subalterns whose insolence the much-enduring Longtick had borne with such smirking philosophy. "Snip" grew in later years to be a Monster beyond the management of the puny Frankensteins who had called him into being, and the "goose" and "shears," and other paraphernalia of the fashioner, suggested any but jocose associations to the facetious young fellows who now deprecated the severity of that same Simon Longtick whose occupation had once supplied so broad a target for their dull wits. Now, Dashwood had never been out of debt to Longtick since he was introduced at the tailor's as "just joining" his first and costliest regiment. He had paid, now and again, something on account; but to be credited with, say, a fifty pound instalment, to be balanced a fortnight later by a new uniform, three suits of mufti, studs, watch-

guard, jewelled waistcoat buttons, and a hamper of Champagne and Moselle, is not adapted to set a man clear with the world. He owed, then, a great deal to Longtick and Sons; and Simon, the only Longtick whom he had ever dealt with, and who may have been paternal or filial for aught that his careless customers knew, was ambiguously threatening and vaguely peremptory.

The Behemoth, too, was a very perplexing patron, Sir Frederick's first visit to Pitt Street had by no means been the last. Such visits never are. He had found his way back to the money-lender's lair without requiring the guidance of friendly Major Raffington. The reception which awaited him there was never very certainly to be divined beforehand. Sometimes the Behemoth would not see him; sometimes he had his audience, only to be entertained with urbane reproaches on his want of punctuality as to the taking



up of his bills. There were also lucky days, days which Roman superstition would have marked with a white stone, when he went away from Pitt Street with a brisk step, a light heart, and a little magic slip of gold-compelling paper in his pocket. But on these rare occasions he was compelled to sign all kinds of documents, until it would have puzzled an actuary to ascertain the precise relations between Dashwood and the obliging Baron Swartz. Sir Frederick had had an easier time of it since he had become a client of that estimable capitalist: he could pay his washerwoman, settle with the waiter at his club, and get rid of one or two irrepressible persons who had been prone to sit for hours in his entrance-hall in Jekyl Street, loudly proclaiming that they would not stir until Sir Frederick, "as he called himself," had settled their little account of fourteen, twelve, six. But he was yet in Longtick's power, and, metaphorically

speaking, knew himself to be under the thumb of Baron Swartz, a white thumb, adorned by a signet-ring of price, and set off by a filbert nail of exquisite pinkness, but a thumb that looked as if it could press cruelly, if its owner were so minded.

What object the monarch of money-lenders had in view was more than Dashwood could conjecture. Sir Frederick did not believe in disinterested benevolence, and had little faith in philanthropy. He was certain that the Behemoth's acquaintance with himself was not maintained for the friendly purpose of enabling him to liquidate his dinner-bills, or to pay off testy shopkeepers and job-masters, infuriate at having been "kep' out" of the amounts due for hacks, carriages, and horse-keep longer than human patience could endure. But he had sense enough to see that Baron Swartz was none the richer for the transactions into which he had as yet entered with the impenitent prodigal of Jekyl

Street. Dashwood's bills were constantly falling due, and being renewed, and consolidated, and so forth; and what with interest, premium, and principal, the aggregate was growing like some huge financial fungus. But, save in promises, Sir Frederick had in nowise reimbursed the Jew such advances as had from time to time been doled out to him. He felt strangely unnerved, then, when a coroneted envelope was brought to him, inclosing a note in the well-known handwriting, smaller and clearer than our insular penmanship produces, and which ran briefly thus: "Baron Swartz presents his compliments to Captain Sir Frederick Dashwood, and would feel himself greatly obliged if Sir Frederick Dashwood could conveniently call in Pitt Street, say to-morrow, about twelve."

"He never sent for me before," said Dashwood ruefully, as he showed this letter that evening, in a cardroom at his military club, to his ally, Major Raffington.


"I have always called on him of my own accord, ay, and kicked my heels in the ante-room while I was about it. I have a notion, now, that the Behemoth means mischief."

Major Raffington shook his head, and groaned sympathetically.

"I suppose you'll go, though, old fellow," he said: "the Behemoth's invitations are like royal commands, not to be refused."

## CHAPTER III.

### A SAD CHAPTER.

ARRYING and giving in marriage certainly do occupy a larger proportion of feminine than of masculine thoughts, and it is natural, although the strong-minded sisterhood may object, that this should be so. Such, at any rate, was the opinion of the Dowager Lady Livingston, who was rather inclined, than otherwise, to plume herself on her superior sagacity, when she wrote urgently to Oswald Charlton, all but entreating her late Lord's nephew to resume his visits at the Fountains. The aged peeress was

beginning to feel, and to resent, the truth, that there are things which money cannot buy, and she was the more angry because she desired nothing but to bring about the happiness of those who were dear to her. It is not only, according to Lamb's quaint saying, the round man alone, but sometimes the round woman as well, who finds herself roughly inserted in the three-cornered hole. To have been the abbess of some highly privileged convent, a despotic queen-regnant, or a good fairy, able by the wave of her starry wand to bestow riches and felicity on the deserving hunchbacks and rags on the bad, would have precisely suited her. And now, here was Beatrice, her darling Beatrice, strangely dear to the childless old woman, who had never schemed or laboured for the welfare of a daughter, pining and fading beneath her eyes, because she loved a man whom duty compelled her to abandon for another, whom she regarded with dislike and fear; for the sentiment which

.

Dashwood now inspired in the object of his interested affections was akin to fear.

The dowager was angry with all concerned, but chiefly with herself. There was Beatrice, with her Quixotic code of honour, and her blind devotion to the wishes of her dead mother ; there was Sir Frederick, grasping, greedy, callous, concealing the iron hand beneath the velvet glove ; there, lastly, was Lady Livingston, self-convicted of having blundered sadly when she believed herself to be acting for the best. Had she not put forth all coaxing arts for the conciliation of the very man, who, of all others, was the likeliest to make her darling miserable ! Had she not thrown Beatrice and her cousin together, confident in her own wisdom, and secure in the knowledge of her own ultimate resolves, and with what a result ! She had merely riveted the chain that bound her young kinswoman to the disreputable baronet, and caused much unhappiness to the

person from whom, if she could, she would most willingly have fenced off all the ills of life. She, therefore, eager to repair the errors of the past, wrote to Oswald Charlton to call him back to the Fountains.

Oswald could not choose but comply with this behest. He knew, or divined, what was the dowager's purpose in thus recalling him, and he instinctively felt that more of pain than pleasure was likely to accrue from such a renewal of his former intimacy. But the temptation was more than he could resist, and he came. As he passed the hall-door, the sound of singing met his ears, and he paused, listening, as some wayfarer in a South American forest might pause to hearken to the strange wild notes of some feathered minstrel as yet uncatalogued by the naturalists of Europe. A clear and powerful voice, exquisitely modulated, and managed with much skill, but yet unpleasing in the general effect which it produced upon an



ear that was quick and sympathetic, such a voice as that of the mocking-bird, whose sweetest strains of borrowed music are apt to change abruptly into shrieks of anguish, and the despairing laughter of the Lost. There was no such violent transition in this instance, and it was not until the last cadence had died away, that Oswald looked his inquiry of the old butler at his elbow.

“Miss Beatrice’s music teacher, sir—a young teacher from London—comes twice a week, and mostly spends some time here,” said that steady functionary.

And when Oswald entered the well-known room, he found, in addition to the regular members of the family, a slight and elfish form, with colourless hair, and sallow face, and weird expression, not at all such as he should have connected with the chant which he had just overheard.

But it was not immediately that Charlton had leisure to observe so insignificant an individual as Aphy Larpent, the “young

woman from London." There was the dear, dear face, so often seen in dreams, so steadfastly enshrined in memory, somewhat paler and sadder than of old, but with the same pure prettiness of mould, the same look of trustful innocence. One glimpse he had of the lovelight shining forth from Beatrice's eyes, and there was a delicious instant when he marked her sudden blush and start at his unexpected entry! But the drill of good society teaches us to subdue all outward manifestations of feeling, and Miss Fleming betrayed herself no more, save that her little hand was cold and trembling as it rested for a moment in his. The dowager was brisker and more genial than she had been of late, but she was careful not to say a word regarding her own prayer to her husband's nephew to resume his old intimacy at a house which he had of late learned to avoid. Lady Livingston's desire was to atone for the harm done by her former diplomacy, and she really, on this

occasion, displayed the supreme tact which consists in letting things, to all appearance, alone. That is not the most expert coachman who squares his elbows obtrusively, and forces on the notice of all beholders what a painful and difficult task it is to drive. The fencer who flourishes his sword, and gives staccato beats with his blade, and cries Ha! ha! with the ferocity of a blood-thirsty Bobadil, is not always a match for the quiet swordsman who thrusts home at the unguarded moment.

Presently, the young person from London, who had to some extent ingratiated herself in the goodwill of the titled mistress of the Fountains, and was, as the butler had truly indicated, often pressed to remain as a guest after having executed her official duties as a teacher, went away; and Lady Livingston unostentatiously contrived that both Violet Maybrook and herself should quit the room, and that the lovers should be left alone together. It was for this that

the dowager had asked Oswald to resume his visits at the house of his uncle's widow, and she purred with blameless satisfaction as she perceived the partial success of her simple stratagem. Violet fell, more than willingly, into her employer's arrangements. She would, herself, have given very much to have separated Dashwood's future fortunes from those of Miss Fleming, and her prompt prescience had warned her from the first that in this innocent girl she had encountered her most dangerous rival with the man whom, knowing and reading him as she did, she still loved so well.

The lovers were left alone. Who is there so cold and dull as not to remember when those few and simple words would have been as a foretaste of Elysium, when the base earth, and the grovelling cares of sordid life, rolled away like the changing scenery of a theatre, and all was glorious, tender, almost divine, because of the one world-old story of loving, and being loved

again ! But there is a difference between the first thrilling emotion of new hopes, new interests, new joys, and the mere tremulous longing when some rigid barrier of honour or of faith arises to divide those who would gladly join their hands. So it was now. Beatrice looked timidly down, as if afraid that her eyes might betray her thoughts, and Charlton, too, was more embarrassed than is usual with members of his profession. It was for him to speak, however, and so he began, not taking refuge in general topics, but plunging at once into the only one which could have had a zest for those two. "I have been a long time absent from the dear old house," he said ; "you can guess why, Miss Fleming, unless I am much mistaken."

"Yes !" she said, softly ; but as yet she did not look up, and he went on.

"I stayed away for more reasons than one. I feared, for one thing, that my presence might give you needless annoyance—might

remind you of hopes which were very likely presumptuous, but which, at any rate, were never to be realized. And then I could not come without pain to myself. Lady Livingston—dear, good, old soul—wrote to reproach me with neglecting her, and I had not the heart to stay away. But was it right that I should come here?"

"I am—that is, we are—very glad indeed to see you, Mr. Charlton," said Beatrice, with that beautiful hypocrisy which only a young girl, and an innocent one, can practise, transparent as it is, without its degenerating into affectation.

Oswald smiled somewhat sadly. "Perhaps, for my own peace of mind, it is not right," he said, as he rose from his chair and leaned against the corner of an old cabinet, richly inlaid in rare woods, and ivory, and mother-of-pearl, the work of some cunning Japanese artist of those far-off days when Japan was as a book bound and clasped against the intrusive West. "But dearly as I may

have to pay for the present pleasure of hearing the one voice, and of looking upon the one face, that to me are more than all the world, I am glad that I came."

Miss Fleming's only answer was, that her head bent down a little lower, and that a flush of dainty pink suffused her pale cheek; and yet she was supremely happy for one short instant, as she drank in those welcome words. She was not forgotten, then. She was loved still by the man whom, in her heart, she acknowledged as her own chosen one; and that sweet assurance did much to take away the smart of weeks and months of care and sorrow. But she did not speak; and after a while Oswald's voice again broke the silence.

"When I came to Richmond to-day," he said, "at my good aunt's invitation, I had schooled myself into believing that, even if the opportunity occurred, I should say nothing to you, Miss Fleming, which mere acquaintance, mere friendship, would not

warrant. Here is the opportunity, and I cannot help, as you see, recurring to the past—cannot help expressing the anxiety which I feel as to your future. May I, without rudeness, ask if your cousin, Sir Frederick Dashwood, has been often here of late ?”

“He comes sometimes—not very often. He was here two days ago,” replied Beatrice, with evident reluctance.

“And does he—forgive me if I presume on the memory of our former conversation to ask questions which only my deep interest in your welfare could excuse—press his suit, his claim, I would say ?” rejoined Oswald.

“He spoke once, once only : it is some time since then,” answered Beatrice, in a faint, low voice.

“He perseveres, then, in forcing his addresses upon you, even in opposition to your own will ?” said the young man ; and there was a hard, metallic ring in his voice, that



made Beatrice, for the first time, lift her head in alarm and look Oswald in the face.

"You will not quarrel with him—not seek him out, I mean," she said, eagerly: "that would be worse than all."

Charlton laughed somewhat bitterly. "No fear of that," he replied; "the days of chivalry are past, and gentlemen no longer break spears or cross swords because they love the same lady. I have no reasonable ground for differing with Sir Frederick Dashwood—so the world would say—because he would snatch from me the one flower that I would have for the pride of my own garden, for the joy and solace of my own life, merely—I know him—to crush it in his reckless grasp, and then to toss it aside to fade and wither! I only want to know what answer he received."

"From me, you mean?" said Beatrice, sobbing.

"From yourself, dear Beatrice," returned Charlton, as he approached her. "I can imagine how he spoke and acted; but what was your reply?"

"That I must keep my word," said Beatrice, as she looked up, and her truthful eyes, swimming in tears, met Oswald's; "that I must keep it at any cost; that if he chose to take me, I was bound to submit; but that I could never, never care for him, never love him, if I wearied out a lifetime by his side! I even said——" She was silent, blushing deeply, and her eyes drooped; but her sudden change of colour, and her embarrassment, gave the young man a clue to her meaning, and he hastily exclaimed—

"That you did care for another! You told him *that*, and he was too mean, too heartless, to release you from this hateful compact, into which you had been so cruelly entrapped? Knowing what I know, by report, concerning this man, I cannot won-

der that his ear should have been deaf to your appeal."

"He was deaf to it," said Beatrice, despondently. "I did not tell him in distinct words that I—I valued another above him; but he understood me, and treated my poor little remonstrance as if it had been the wayward fancy of a child. Oh, it is hard, it is hard; but if he will have the fulfilment of my pledge, exacted by her who is gone, I can but yield. He said he would not be in a hurry to press his claim, so that it were but fully and fairly acknowledged as binding; and hitherto he has been so far merciful that he has said no more to me since then. But each morning the detested thought comes, cold and numbing as the touch of death, that he may speak, and that I am his slave, if he will have it so." Her tears fell quick and heavily; and Oswald Charlton almost forgot the ruin of his own high hopes in unselfish pity for her, so tender, young, and pure, thus doomed to

vistas of misery far beyond her own imagining.

"Beatrice," he said—"I may call you Beatrice, may I not?—we were always to be friends, you know, and I do but take a friend's privilege in caring for your happiness. Unless I do Sir Frederick Dashwood great injustice, it is the prospect of enjoying, as your husband, the use of Lady Livingston's ample inheritance, that makes him so resolute in asserting the rights over you which an evil fortune has given him. In your place, I would go to the dowager, tell her all, and——"

"I have told her everything already," interrupted Beatrice, wringing her hands; "but it was useless. I have begged and prayed of her to make me no heiress, since the very idea of her bounty had already allured the cupidity of one as ruthless as any vulture that ever flew screaming towards a prey. But she did but laugh, in her kind, wise way, telling me not to fret

myself, since all would presently be well. She has tried, indeed, to reason me out of my belief that I am bound by my promise made beside my mother's death-bed ; but she was compelled to admit that I had the best of the argument. And, indeed, so I had. You, Oswald—I may call my friend so—you would not counsel me to perjure myself, or to break my word ?”

“ No, dear,” said Oswald, hoarsely, as he drew his hand across his own eyes ; “ I would not. That was a noble poet who penned those words :—


“ ‘ I could not love thee, sweet, so much,  
Loved I not honour more.’ ”

If ever you need a friend, remember you have one in Oswald Charlton, one who would give his life to save you from sorrow ! But he will not, for his sake or yours, counsel you to break your spoken word.” He took her hand, and pressed it, and then, unable to trust his voice to utter more,

walked from the room, and from the house. When Lady Livingston returned, she found that Oswald had gone back to London, that Beatrice was weeping in her room above, and that her pet scheme for bringing the young people together had turned out a total failure.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT PIRATE'S POST.

EDFORD ROW, on a bright, bleak day, when spring sunshine went hand in hand with the searching blasts of an easterly wind, presented a cheerier aspect than it had done on that snowy afternoon of early winter which had witnessed Sir Frederick Dashwood's fruitless visit to Goodeve and Glegg. But the mechanism of the legal mill within doors went on working with its usual slow and smooth precision, and still the bones of litigants were ground to make the bread of the eminent practitioners whose

names were dimly visible on the dingy doorposts. There, each at his desk, were the veteran clerks and the irreverent office-lads of Oriental descent, and there, as before, was that pattern penman and discreet copyist, Mr. Daniel Davis. The last-mentioned personage stood higher in the firm's regard than during the first months of his being numbered among the scribes in those Bedford Row offices. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he had risen in the opinion of his chief, the senior partner in Goodeve and Glegg's well-known house. Mr. Goodeve himself had by no means raised himself, of late, in the eyes of his partner and his subordinates. Glegg groaned over his sins of omission and the vacillating policy that threw so much of thankless toil upon the hard-worked junior. It was now no secret in the office that Mr. Goodeve's business capacities were not what they had been. "The governor's going stale!" was a frequent comment



among the boys who carried bagfuls of papers to and from the law-courts and taxing-masters; and although the steady old clerks were too heedful of the commonweal to disparage their employer's intellect, they could not forbear from speaking to him on business topics in more peremptory style than they would have ventured to use a year or two before.

There are few positions more painful than that of a man dimly conscious of failing powers, and nervously anxious lest those with whom he deals should find out the weak joints in his harness. Small slights are magnified in his estimation, and the more so that he dares not resent them, for fear of betraying the feebleness that he would fain hide from himself, if he could.

So it was with Mr. Samuel Goodeve. Before the outside vulgar, he could yet keep up a show of fair seeming. The crass ignorance which every lawyer reckons on as the first attribute of a client,

prevented his increasing mistakes from being made patent. But he knew that Glegg was beginning to humour him as though he were a child; while the managing clerks could not restrain their impatience when his memory proved deficient, as was often the case, in little matters of detail with which he had once been fully conversant. Davis alone treated him with the same grave and intelligent deference which he had from the first displayed; and it is not wonderful that Mr. Goodeve should have learned to consider Davis as a very superior young man indeed, and to apply to him for help in moments when the routine of regular work was interrupted by some jarring of the machinery. And Davis, when thus consulted, was so admirable a coadjutor, never presuming on the trust reposed in him, suggesting rather than advising, and having the crowning art of making his own lucid thoughts appear as though they sprang, Minerva-like, from the

bemuddled brain of the head of the firm !

The dark young clerk's services had been acknowledged, but not very substantially ; his salary had been raised, but only by some poor half-crown a week ; and Mr. Glegg had protested stoutly against any such largess.

"You'll make every quill-driver of the lot discontented and envious ;" such had been the remonstrance of the junior solicitor ; "and the end of it will be that we shall have to raise their wages all round. Make use of the fellow, if he's the paragon you say, but don't overpay him ; and, if you'll allow me to interfere on such a point, Mr. Goodeve, I'd not let him make so many cash out-goings on our behalf, or be quite so constant at the banker's counter, as I understand to have been the case lately."

But on these subjects Mr. Goodeve was confident of his own right to judge, and

Daniel Davis continued to fetch and carry coin and cheques as before, and got to know a good deal of the arcana of the firm's business.

Office-hours were at length over on the day which had beheld Oswald Charlton's interview with Beatrice Fleming, and the clerks of Goodeve and Glegg, some in company, and others alone, went on their several ways. Among these last was Daniel Davis, who, as usual, set his face westwards, and walked sturdily on, as if bound for Great Eldon Street and home. Not for long, however, since, plunging abruptly into a narrow court, where the daylight filtered down between high roofs and overhanging chimney-stacks, as into some ravine among the rocks, he left the roaring thoroughfare behind, and presently emerged into a net work of slimy streets, where the tenacious London mud seemed perennially to cling to the slippery stones of the carriage-way, and where all the

dwellings, and the shops, and the people looked distressingly alike. Daniel Davis must have known town well, or his former experiences of seafaring and a woodsman's life must have facilitated the results of his study of the map, since he struck out a course for himself, which, devious as it was, he followed without any sign of hesitation or of perplexity. It was not, however, until after a long spell of swift walking that he emerged from the grimy labyrinth of dismal streets, and was once more in one of the main arteries of London traffic. His face was set eastwards now, and that too at the hour when the tide of human beings was running strongly in the opposite direction, and when the City was fast being emptied of its fast but floating population.

An empty omnibus, creeping towards the deserted heart of the world's commerce, whence the black stream of busy life was ebbing so rapidly, was not hard to find, and Mr. Daniel Davis thus journeyed on through

famous streets where for generations fortunes had been made or marred, until at last the dilatory vehicle in which he was a passenger crossed London Bridge, and there set him down. He pulled down his hat over his brows, and pushed on, walking swiftly, as before, and still towards the east. It was not so easy, there, as he had found it on the Middlesex side of the Thames, to proceed by parallel routes, or to make circuits which should enable him, with some extra trouble and fatigue, to strike the main road at a point remote from that which he had already reached. Yet, whenever it was possible to do so, he avoided the principal thoroughfares, skirting blocks of ancient buildings huddled together, diving down unsavoury lanes, and gliding rapidly past the prison-like walls of monstrous factories, and grudging, to all appearance, no trouble, so that his progress should be unperceived. At last he found himself in a region where liquor saloons, shopfronts full of cheap and

tawdry wares, and the narrow doorways, blocked by stands of sun-sketched portraits, of touting photographers, began to give way to emporiums still more markedly suburban, low-browed taverns, sheds where coals, greens, and potatoes were vended in picturesque confusion across the rough board that did duty for a counter, and constantly recurring marine store shops.

A queer district this, and not a very likely one in which a client of Messrs. Goodeve and Glegg, solicitors with so distinguished a connection, might be expected to reside. There was an ancient and fish-like smell which pervaded the dusky alleys and crowded courts to left and right, and which was not dispelled even by the wholesome but pungent odours of heated tar and seething pitch from yonder boat-builder's yard, where hammering and caulking were still going on in lively fashion, though the toils of ordinary workmen seemed over for that day. A queer district, with decidedly a

maritime and amphibious flavour about it, which yet lacked the racy smack of real sea-water. There were giant warehouses topped by towering cranes that looked as though nothing, not even the Tun of Heidelberg, could have been too weighty for the sway of their iron arms ; and there were stores where masts and sails, booms and cordage, overflowed the buildings, and lumbered the enclosures behind the palings viciously studded with crooked nails, like hooks set to catch men.

It was not a spot to which to resort, surely, for purposes of pleasure, and yet, if Mr. Daniel Davis was there on some errand of the firm's whose pay he drew, it must be confessed that he went about this business after a most peculiar and stealthy fashion.

Looking at his watch, he threw a quick upward glance at the fading sky, and then shook his head.

"I have made good speed," he said ;  
"too good, and have time to spare."



And without any further comment, he walked on, though in more leisurely style than before, stopping now and then, as if to make sure of some landmark or local indication.

"It ought to be hereabouts," he said; "but it is better to be certain on that head."

Accordingly he made choice of a booth where potatoes, firewood, and modicums of coal were being vended by the glare of three unshaded gas-burners, and propounded two inquiries, to which the wooden-legged proprietor of the establishment readily rejoined.

"As for the Creek, master, it's right ahead of you; and if you bear up a little towards the starboard tack, you'll find the toll-bridge and the causeway for foot-walkers—the carts and carriages pass round t'other side of the church. And as for a decent public near the water, you can't do better than the 'Anchor Fluke,' kept by an old

shipmet of mine, in Rodney Row. Anybody'll show it to you."

Briefly thanking this communicative trafficker, Mr. Davis, or, to give him his proper name, Bruce Larpent, proceeded to follow the directions which he had been given. Evening was now closing in, and that the more quickly for the dull damp fog that rose from marsh and pool along the river's shore, and hung like a gray shroud worn breast-high, around the lounging groups that gathered, pipes in their mouths, and hands thrust into the pockets of loose monkey-jackets, made of coarse blue pilot-cloth, soddened by much exposure to weather, around the stone stairheads, of which the lowest steps were worn by the lapping of water, and discoloured by ooze and slime. Bright lights gleamed through the thin red curtains of upper rooms, wherein, to judge by the squeaking of fiddles and the stamping of feet, to say nothing of the various shadows that gyrated from window to win-

dow, dancing, perhaps not duly licensed by an enlightened magistracy, was going on. From these and other houses of entertainment came the clink of glasses and the chorus of sailors' songs, and shrill female objurgations or shriller laughter, and the deeper tones of men, some brawling, others loud in noisy good-humour. There were more men, more women, more children, abroad, since the first closing in of the darkness, than there had been before; and oyster-stalls, and orange-sellers, and peripatetic purveyors of hot coffee, pies, whelks, and other creature comforts appeared to drive what was literally a roaring trade.

"This must be the Creek, and yonder is the foot-bridge, with its toll-bar, and collector in his white apron," said Bruce Larpent, as he came to a halt. "Now, where, I wonder, is Rodney Row?" Of the three first persons to whom he put this question, one, a woman, whose tangled hair hung loose beneath a battered bonnet, answered

with a laugh of tipsy scorn; the second, a lad in tattered corduroy, made some jeering reply as he sidled off up an alley; and the third, a thoughtful-faced mechanic in paper cap and fustian vest, civilly deplored his inability, as a stranger to the district, and, "no just that long frae Aberdeen," to impart the required information. But a gruff, old, rum-perfumed boatman, rolling past in his tarpaulin hat and loose mud-boots, gave a more satisfactory response to the appeal.

"I'm a-going thereabouts myself," said this Triton of the Thames; "so, if you walks along o' me, I'll show you, from the corner, where the 'Anchor Fluke' stands."

He further, as they paced onwards, replied to another question of Bruce's as follows: "Do I know Pirate's Post! Do I know my grandmother's best set of tea-things, when I see it! Why, I was born not a quarter of a mile off it; and all us chaps by the water, longshoremen and that, know the old rotten bit o' timber where

Captain Kydd's second mate, or the bo'sen, I don't mind which, was hanged in chains after the lot of 'em had suffered at Execution Dock. Many's the time I've played, when I was a boy, near that rotten bit of old timber; but none of us, hark ye, would overly have cared to go there alone by night. 'Tis in a field, if you can call it a field now, where there's a lot of rusty steam-boilers and broken machinery lying about, a stone's throw from the 'Anchor Fluke,' and you can see it when the moon's up, from the door."

It was a squalid district that they were traversing, and one not exempt from some risk to the belated wayfarer. At the mouth of lanes and courts that looked like caverns, and from within which resounded oaths, and ear-piercing whistles, and the sharp sound of catcalls, loitered several unwashed knots of lads and young men, some of whom laughed rudely as they stared the stranger in the face, while others swaggered

forward, as if to dispute the passage of the foot-way. As the dark young clerk and his nautical Mentor passed by the largest of these gatherings, one of the company, a mere boy, made a quick dash at Bruce Larpent's silver watch-chain, a few links of which were visible through the lappels of his closely buttoned coat, at the same time uttering in shrill accents the well-known watchword of the London thieves. But Bruce, cool, strong, and active, caught the lad by the collar, and held him at arm's length, and there was something in his resolute aspect which deterred the seniors of the group from joining in the attack.

"I don't want to hurt you, my young friend," he said, as the captive writhed and struggled; "but we must have no more jokes of this sort, if you please;" while the old mariner broke in with: "For shame, young limb, you; I know your carrotty head well enough, you Ste Jackson, and you'll never be worth your salt, on the cross or on

the square, you won't. Come, you clear off, since the gentleman's willing to take it as a lark ; so no more of your nonsense !”

And the discomfited stripling, as soon as Bruce's hold relaxed, slunk back ; while the others, one of whom muttered something about “not worth while—regular game look—old Billy with him too,” offered no hindrance to Larpent's proceeding on his way.

“You see, sir, our people hereabouts are apt to be a little saucy with a stranger. Keep your temper, though, and your weather eye open at the same time, and, bless ye, you'll come to no hurt,” said the boatman as they turned the corner. “Now, my road lies down here ; but yon is Rodney Row, close to the river ; and you'll find the ‘Anchor Fluke’ at the end of it.”

Rodney Row was not, as Bruce saw it, a very cheerful place of residence, consisting as it did of four or five hovels, each standing in a garden, where a few cabbages

were cultivated behind palings made of the tarred staves of old casks ; of a dismal warehouse, abutting on the river ; of a dis-used factory, the tall chimney of which rose ghastly above the creeping fog ; and of a largelow building, from the windows of which a few lights glimmered, and which the explorer rightly guessed to be the oddly named hostelry of which he was in search. The "Anchor Fluke" proved to be one of those mouldering, rat-haunted public-houses that here and there crop up among the outskirts of what seafaring men describe as the Port of London. Once, it had probably done a flourishing business, when privateersmen, flushed with plunder, and men-of-war's crews eager to get rid of the pay and prize-money burning in their unthrifty pockets, had revelled in its dingy tap-room, and considered its frowsy garden, with the sunflowers and wooden images, a very Paradise of delights. Those days were gone, for there is a fashion even among sailors



ashore ; and now the "Anchor Fluke" resembled some rotting hulk perishing at moorings in the muddy river hard by. Such as it was, however, the smoke-dried landlord (in red flannel jacket, hairy cap, and high sea-boots), and the one-eyed Hebe of the bar, were civil enough ; and Bruce was inducted into the deserted coffee-room, and was served with the simple refreshments for which he had asked. He had no great appetite, however ; and when the Dutch cheese and the ship's biscuits, and the pewter measure of frothing ale had been placed upon the stained and rickety table at his elbow, he sat idly looking forth from the window, glancing up from time to time at the great yellow-faced clock, that ticked so loudly in the bar without, and the dial-plate of which was visible from where his chair was placed.

An hour went by in this manner, during which the darkness gradually increased, and the lights on board ship came twinkling

out, one after another, until they were so numerous that it seemed as if they were wandering stars that had dropped, unextinguished, into the water; and the fog crawled higher and higher along the melancholy shore, and then the moon peeped out from between the bars of cloud that spanned the sky, and shone white through the gray mists of evening. With a sigh of relief, Bruce Larpent tossed off what was left of the ale, and rising, he paid for what he had consumed, and left the tavern without making any inquiry as to the direction which he should take.

“If Pirate’s Post be as near as my talkative old friend asserted it to be,” said the young man, as he sallied forth, “it will be no hard task to find its whereabouts for myself.”

And, indeed, at no great distance, he discerned what looked at first like the carcasses of some primeval monsters, giant saurians left stranded on the tide-mud. Approach-

ing, he could see that these were old boilers, corroded and worthless, until such a time as a new baptism of fire should turn the rejuvenated metal into a molten stream, ready to take new shapes and serve new uses. And beyond these rose a ragged stump of weather-stained timber, irregular in outline, hacked, chipped, and battered, but yet standing forth from the swampy soil in uncompromising endurance, like some huge tooth left alone in the midst of an otherwise denuded jaw.

"The Pirate's Post, I'll lay my life on it," said Bruce, and he walked briskly towards it.

The white moon yielded but a weak and wavering light, and it was not until the young clerk had drawn very near, that he thought he could distinguish the outline of a human form leaning against the jagged pile, and seeming almost as if it were some grotesque image rudely carved by the tools of some semi-savage sculptor. Then, as

Bruce came close up to the wooden pillar, the ungainly figure before him glided back a pace or so, wriggling its body, and contorting its limbs as it did so.

"Is that you, Craney? But of course it is," called out Larpent, half-impatiently, but in a cautious undertone. The twisting form came shambling towards him, not moving in a direct line, but crab-wise, and was soon distinctly visible. The white moonlight showed the figure of a man of middle height, narrow in the chest, narrow in the forehead, hatchet-faced, but with high shoulders, limbs that were lean and loosely hung, and a neck so long and spare, that a single inspection of it served to explain whence its owner had derived the nickname by which Bruce had just addressed him.

"Yes, my noble sportsman; yes, my gallant captain; Craney it is, and no mistake!" said the long-necked man, bending his body as if he had been an actual eel,

and rubbing his bony hands together. "Was I the sort to keep a gentleman, and my benefactor too, kicking his heels in such a moist meeting-place as this!" Distressingly glib of speech was Craney, slurring over his words with the slippery fluency of one whom it was easy to fancy as presiding over a stock-in-trade consisting of a deal table, a pea, and three thimbles, and who at other times might be a plausible "welcher" on a racecourse, a seller of counterfeit sovereigns "for a wager," or even a voluble assistant at a mock auction-room.

"We are both of us, I believe, pretty punctual," returned Bruce. "And now to business. When last we met, I explained to you the nature of the job, and the kind of assistance I should require at your hands. Have you spoken to those former associates of yours of whom you told me when we met——"

"When we met, indeed, my kind young gentleman! And what a blessed surprise

it was to poor old Craney to see one whom he believed to be hundreds and thousands of miles away, here in the London streets ; but the sight of you is indeed good for——” interrupted the man, in the wheedling tone that was habitual to him ; but Larpent in turn cut short his discourse.

“ Hark you, Craney,” he said ; “ time is of value, and we may as well understand each other at once. You have a habit of spinning yarns, so confirmed, that I doubt if you know when you are sincere, and when your talk is mere palaver. But when we did meet by accident the other night, I saw genuine tears in those eyes of yours, and I do believe that you had a grateful sentiment towards the man who helped you out of an awkward scrape ; for Captain Hayman uttered no vain threat when he swore to throw the stowaways overboard to drown ; and I have known him do as much to a poor devil of a mulatto deck-hand, who fell ill from hard usage, and

whom the skipper called a malingerer. You recollect?"

"Yes, I recollect," said Craney, in a subdued voice, and with a shudder that was real enough. "How could we help it, sir, we two poor, starving, shoeless creatures, Joe and self, lurking about the New Orleans quay; or how could we guess that the schooner we crept on board of after dark would turn out to be a craft of such a character, and commanded by such a wretch as that slaver captain! Why, Mr. Larpent, but for you, we'd never have lived to go ashore again; but you did stand by us like a good one, and I'm not likely, bad as I am, to forget to whom I owe my life. If you want a proof, try me."

"My good friend," said Bruce, "I ask nothing from you excepting silence and discretion. My name, which, save to yourself, is known but to one man in England, must be kept dark, you understand, whatever be the upshot of this affair?"

Craney nodded assent.

"And now," pursued the young clerk, "matters are ripe for action. Whatever can be readily converted into cash will be the well-earned recompense of the——"

"Of the operation, if you please, sir; we need not be too explicit," chimed in Craney, rubbing his hands and ducking his head. "Ah, sir, I had an education, as you have probably perceived, and didn't think, when I took prizes at school, I should ever take to my present profession for a livelihood; but that is an old story now. Would you like to see the Ugly One? He is here now."

"Here? Where?" exclaimed Bruce Larpent, looking around in some surprise, for nothing was visible save the solitary stump of the old gibbet, and, a hundred yards away, the glimmering lights of the tavern.

"Not very far off, noble sportsman, my gallant sportsman!" said Craney, with a chuckle; and immediately afterwards the



mewling cry of a cat, so accurately imitated that Bruce was himself for a moment deceived, resounded through the marshy meadow. At the third repetition of the cry the sound of oars was heard, and very soon a man came scrambling up the bank, dragging with him the chain of the small boat from which he had just emerged, and which he proceeded to fasten to an iron peg which he drove into the ground, and then, still stooping, drew near.

"All right, all fly, Craney?" hoarsely whispered the new comer: "this is our new companion, eh?"

The man, who was about thirty years of age, was short of stature, but with unusually broad shoulders, and a resolute, low-browed face, somewhat akin in the massiveness of the jaw, and the bold stare of the round, bloodshot eyes, to that of a peculiarly vicious bull-dog. He was clad in a nondescript fashion, not uncommon among those who pick up a precarious living be-

low bridge, his jacket of dark-blue Guernsey cloth, and bandana neckerchief, contrasting oddly with the coarse slop-clothes and nailed shoes and cap of brown woollen, that completed his costume.

“There’s a bunch of fives for you!” cried Craney, admiringly pointing to the extended digits of his friend. “No deception there, sir, but an article equal, any day, to the clutch of an iron vice. You’ve a strong gripe, sir, as most seafaring gents have, but you’d hardly like to try squeeze for squeeze with my mate here. He can smash a Brazil nut with his fingers, and crack a coco on his head, the Ugly can! A better partner in his own line couldn’t be.”

The subject of these commendations uttered an amicable growl, which was cut short by a sudden exclamation from his oratorical friend.

“Here it comes, flish-flash down the lane—a police bull’s-eye, that is,” exclaimed the latter.—“Jump in, Ugly, and catch hold of

the oars. I'm after you.—It would never do, sir, for us to be found here; but any time after four to-morrow we'll be at the 'Birdcatcher's Arms,' Chelsea, the lot of us. The Philistines can't say anything to you; but with us 'tis different." And without further ceremony, he followed his comrade into the boat, which instantly pushed off. The red gleam of the bull's-eye lantern came nearer and nearer, and as Larpent left the field, he encountered the policeman who carried it, and who took a long and steady survey of his personal appearance.

"This is but a queer neighbourhood," he said, civilly: "be careful, sir, I advise you."

The dark young clerk thanked him for the warning, and striding rapidly on, was soon lost in the shadow of the night.

## CHAPTER V.

### WHAT THE BEHEMOTH MEANT.



MAJOR RAFFINGTON was accurate in declaring that the Behemoth's invitations, like those of royalty, admitted of no denial. Indeed, Baron Swartz shared this privilege of issuing an imperative summons, not merely with her Majesty's judges learned in the law, but also with the rank and file of that accommodating profession of which he was an ornament. Many a stately gentleman who would scarcely deign to hurry his steps indecorously to elude a mad bull, or a Hansom cabman the worse for

liquor, will meekly dance attendance for days in the month, and hours in the day, at the abode of some fourth-rate usurer who renews his overdue bills at fast recurring intervals. As yet, the monarch of money-lenders had treated Dashwood fairly well, as Sir Frederick himself was constrained grudgingly to admit. But this very forbearance had its terrors for the insolvent baronet, who had more than once imparted in confidence to Major Raffington his opinion that this state of things was too good to last, and that the Baron was too civil by half. "If I could see what he got, or what he expected to get out of me, I'd feel happier in my mind!" had been Dashwood's own words, oft repeated; and it would certainly have been a great relief to his mind had he been able to account for the long-suffering behaviour of his acquaintance in Pitt Street. Now he was going to learn, no doubt, the motives of the Behemoth; and somehow the idea was scarcely

a pleasant one to him. So, although he would sooner have ridden at the most impracticable fence in Northamptonshire, he was early in Pitt Street on the day appointed.

The little green-liveried page came promptly to answer to the harsh beating of the rusty knocker, and Dashwood almost fancied that there was a sinister expression, as of malicious triumph, on the urchin's keen, white face, which he had never before seen there.

The ante-room in which Dashwood was ushered was well known to him—a mere closet, as far as space was concerned, but sumptuously furnished, in silk velvet and maple-wood, with some French toys, clock and vases of a fantastic pattern on the chimney-piece, and a few gaudily coloured pictures, which some of those who inspected them honestly preferred to the dusky Old Masters in the chamber of reception, on the walls. The party-wall which divided this small room

from the hall of audience was thin, so that it was possible to hear much that was said in the larger apartment, if only the tones of those conversing there were raised above a low conventional pitch. Such was the case now.

"I do implore you, sir, really implore you, not to be so hard with me," said a voice tremulous with emotion; the voice—so Dashwood readily conjectured—of a man advanced in years. "What you ask for would be ruin, positive ruin. I should have to withdraw my youngest son—as good and studious a lad as ever lived—from the university, and to blight his prospects, because of his brother's extravagance."

Then succeeded the bland, cooing accents of the Baron, quite undistinguishable, so far as words went, but apparently employed in a gentle monotone of polite remonstrance.

"The boy has paid you hundreds already!" broke in the voice again, "inte-

rest, charges, and the rest of it. If only you knew, sir, with what a pang of regret I decided myself to make you this final offer of the two thousand pounds, his sister's little fortune, and how poor and straitened we all are, I think that in mercy you would not——” And then again was heard the Baron's soft rejoinder, a little louder this time, and almost immediately afterwards the bell rang; and as the disappointed suppliant withdrew, the page announced to Sir Frederick that the Baron was ready to receive him. Not greatly inspirited by what he had overheard, Dashwood complied with the summons.

The Behemoth was in his accustomed place, his several packets of carefully arranged papers within reach, and he rose to greet the baronet with his usual air of easy courtesy. No one, to look at him, would have imagined that he had been one of the interlocutors in such a conversation as that of which Dashwood had listened to a por-



tion, so perfectly calm and unruffled was the aspect which he presented.

"Sir Frederick," said the baron, as soon as his visitor was seated opposite to him, "our relations to one another have been, up to this time, of a very pleasant description. I have had the happiness to render some slight services to you, and there has been no difficulty as to the trifling formalities which I have proposed for your signature. This memorandum will show you how we stand, and in what sums you are indebted to me." And so saying he handed a balance-sheet to Dashwood, who took it with manifest reluctance, and ran his eye hastily over the figures.

"I suppose it's all right : indeed I'm sure it is," he answered half sullenly.

"It is, as you say, all right," rejoined the smiling baron ; "the vouchers are here, of course, for I do not let paper, with signatures so valuable as yours, pass out of my own possession : you may rely on the cor-

rectness of that statement. The sum-total has grown, you perceive, to really quite an imposing amount ; has it not ?”

“Why, yes,” said Dashwood ruefully ; “it is a lump of money. You are not in a hurry for it back again, I hope, baron ?”

“Not in a hurry ; certainly not ; I never am in that,” said his host, as he laid his plump white hand upon the green morocco of the writing-table, and slowly twisted his signet-ring ; “but I like to keep things orderly, and to see my way. I have had Mr. Longtick here ; that is no novelty, for many of his customers are clients of mine, and he has been talking very much to me about you.”

“About me ! and why ?” asked Dashwood, whose heart throbbed quick and hard.

“Or, perhaps, rather about the money you owe him, and the various methods to which you have resorted for staving off the day of payment,” explained the Behemoth.

“I am afraid you have not quite kept faith with me, Sir Frederick.”

“What do you mean?” asked Dashwood, flushing to the roots of his hair, and smoothing back his heavy moustache. Bad as he was, and low as he had fallen, a charge of falsehood made directly to his face did rouse in him some spirit of manliness.

The Behemoth waved his white hand. “I mean,” he said quietly, “and you must pardon a poor foreigner who speaks your language imperfectly, that I find there are discrepancies between the documents signed by you to content Longtick and Sons, and certain assurances which you gave me when first I had the gratification to make your acquaintance. It appears”—and here he fluttered over first one sheet of paper, and then another—“that you have signed bills, bonds, and so on, for the firm in question, although your memory did not remind you of the circumstance at the period of our

earliest dealings, and that you have signed others since."

"I never pretended," said Dashwood boldly, "to remember all I had ever done, or thoroughly to understand my own affairs. I told you, I think, that I owed a heavy bill to those infernal tailors."

"Yes, my good sir; but there are bills and bills. These people have lodged a detainer, or caveat, or whatever is the word in your insular law, against the price of your commission," returned Swartz, tapping his spotless teeth with a paper-knife; "and had all sorts of other liens upon your property. Well, I'm not in the least angry with you for little inaccuracies of that sort. My own experience shows me that, of ten men in difficulties, nine understate their debts. I have no right to expect you to be an exception to the rule. But Simon Longtick said he could put an end to your career; 'Snuff you out' (forgive my repeating an expression so coarse), was the

word, and I saw no reason to doubt it. Well, Sir Frederick?"

Sir Frederick said nothing, however, but sat scowling and silent. It was coming, then, was it? The gaunt presence of the wolf that had whined and snarled around his door so long was upon him at last—the wolf that besets the domestic castle of many a worthier Englishman than he, and whose name is Ruin! Could not this grinning Jew hunk (it was thus irreverently that he now thought of the fresh-faced, smiling baron) get his writ of *fiere facias*, put in his bill of sale, and have done with it? It may be doubted if the baronet had ever heard of the typical negro whose protest has become proverbial, but at that moment his feelings must have been identical with those of that coloured person. The combination of present "preachee" with future "floggee" was almost intolerable. There was balm, however, in the next words of the Behemoth. "Well," said that amiable

capitalist, leaning back in his chair, after vainly waiting for Dashwood's reply, "it has never been agreeable to me to hear of a friend of mine on whom the extinguishing process can be performed, except by myself, and so, after a little discussion, Mr. Simon and I came to terms. You owe nothing now to Longtick and Sons. A glance at these papers"—offering them as if they had been something good to eat—"will convince you that your liabilities have changed hands, and that I am now, with some exceptions as to book-debts, your sole creditor."

Dashwood seemed to breathe more freely as he heard this. It was inconceivable that the baron should have incurred such heavy expense as a mere preliminary to setting into action the machinery of the law against his needy debtor. And he was rid, at least, of one tyrant, that insufferable tailor, whose memory was tenacious of many a bygone insolence, and who found revenge

to be a toothsome morsel when the tables were turned upon a member of the Gilded Youth, by ministering to whose weakness he fattened. At any rate, the baron could have no rankling grudge, no personal animosity, against one who had never made him the butt of clumsy light-cavalry wit, or rated him for lack of punctuality in sending home the new dress-coat, without which the finest rout was weariness to the budding subaltern.

Swartz, as he sat opposite to Sir Frederick, read his client's thoughts as easily as a practised Orientalist extracts the pith from a page of flowery Persian poetry or of crabbed Talmudical lore. He was in aspect not at all like the Mephistopheles of Goethe, but such sorry Fausts as came in his way he could plumb to the very bottom of their shallow natures. After a brief pause, he went on: "Of course, Sir Frederick, a man of the world like yourself cannot suppose that what I have done was

prompted entirely by a desire to relieve you from embarrassments. I never professed to be disinterested. I should very much prefer to do business with you in our old pleasant style, on velvet, as it were; but in justice to myself I must not neglect to recoup myself the considerable outlay already incurred. Why don't you marry, Sir Frederick?"

This last question was propounded in precisely the same tone of semi-paternal benevolence as that in which a wealthy uncle might have put it while passing the claret jug to a wild young nephew, for whose reformation a family council had recommended the panacea of matrimony.

Sir Frederick started and reddened, but not so much as before. "I have other things than marriage to think of," he said, almost sheepishly; and then added: "besides, it's not so easy for a broken-down beggar like myself."

"Perhaps not, Sir Frederick; and yet



it would be an experiment worth trying," said the Behemoth, with his imperturbable good-humour. "I will put a case hypothetically. We can imagine a gentleman of your rank and antecedents, unfortunately very much involved, but whose good stars have given him a compensation in the shape of a young cousin, very pretty, amiable, and easily managed, and who is notoriously the heiress of a very rich and childless old lady of rank. We can fancy, also, that this young cousin is of a sensitive spirit and truthful nature—such things are—and feels herself bound by a promise to marry, obtained from her by——"

"Are you a witch, or what?" cried Dashwood, jumping from his chair. "I mean," he made haste to say, "how on earth did you——"

"Did I know that?" rejoined the Jew. "Excuse me if I complete your sentence. My very dear sir, it is a part of my business to know something about the past

life of those with whom I deal. Little birds whisper in my ear—the queerest things. By-the-by, that was a fortunate accident that made you heir to the baronetcy—about the poor little boy, I mean.”

“Fortunate, do you call it? I don’t say that myself,” answered Dashwood, with a slight change of colour—this time from red to pale.

“Perhaps not,” said the baron airily; “but—forgive the apparent want of feeling in my remark—you *must* have thought it. They do so, even in the best families. When old Lord Crustham (what port he had, and what a temper!) was taken with his last fatal attack of apoplexy, Tom Crumpwise, the eldest son, happened, for a wonder, to be in the house at Crustham, to give, or sell, his signature for cutting off the entail of some portion of the property. Tom and his noble papa were not on what is called good terms, the heir leading a scrambling life in London on the strength

of post-obits ; and the owner manifesting some desire to knock his own son down with his gouty crutch, or to fling footstools at him, when they did meet. However, in so urgent a case as this, of course filial duty prevailed, and the Honourable Tom sent off a mounted groom to gallop for Dr. Flebotham, the nearest medical man. The horse which the servant took was a spavined brute—they had the stable in a wretched state at Crustham, at that time ; it is better now—which fell lame on the macadamized road ; and, to cut short a long story, when the doctor did come, he might as well have brought the undertaker along with him. ‘ I sat watching at the window,’ Tom said to me when we settled scores, as he described his sensations while the old lord lay battling feebly between life and death, ‘ and I felt it was a race against time.’ And so it was.”

Dashwood made no comment on this agreeable anecdote, and the Behemoth

lightly glided from the subject. "Why, as I said before, not marry?" asked he again.

"If you know so much, you must know more," was the reply. "Lady Livingston never liked me. She has been a trifle more civil since I came home from Canada than ever she was before; but for some short time past I have met black looks whenever I go down to that dreary jail of hers; and as for her approval of my marriage with Beatrice——"

"If I take so much risk on myself," burst in the baron, in a higher key, as he laid his forefinger on the papers, "you might be less faint-hearted. What! king, queen, and as many trump cards as you could wish for, dealt to you, and fear to play! My experience tells me that the young generally get the better of the old, nowadays, and you have the young lady for a sure, if reluctant, ally already. It may be that the dowager would prefer to select another husband for Miss Fleming,

another master for Heavitree Hall. What of that! Press your advantage; marry your cousin, without a penny, if need be; and see if yonder doting old dame disinherits her darling because she has wedded a prodigal like yourself." As he ceased speaking, he touched a spring in the table before him, and out flew a secret drawer, from which he selected two or three slim-looking documents neatly tied with red tape, and formally endorsed. "You will be so kind, Sir Frederick," he said, "as to sign this, having reference to the purchase-money of your commission; and this, which gives me a lien on certain securities that belonged to Sir George, your grandfather, and of which you gave me a list at the commencement of our dealings. In return, here are two hundred pounds in money, and your dishonoured acceptances redeemed from Longtick and Sons. Mind, you only mortgage your securities, and, on certain terms, can redeem them. If you

would like your solicitor to look over these papers—Ah, well! You would not, I think, have been informed that the conditions were too onerous, under the circumstances. Here is another bond, somewhat more [speculative; it engages you, under heavy forfeiture, to repay to Jacob, Baron Swartz, for value received, within twelve calendar months of the decease of the Dowager Lady Livingston, sixteen thousand pounds sterling. You see I count very much on your success with Miss Fleming.”

For a while Dashwood demurred. The magnitude of the sum staggered him somewhat. “It’s more than three years’ rental of the Heavitree property,” he blurted out.

“Yes, my dear sir; but you forget the sum in the funds, in those delicious English three per cents., the stability of which we aliens envy,” said the baron. “It is a point on which I admit of no compromise.


---

Come, sir, peace or war? Will you sign, or shall I ring the bell, and decline further negotiations except through Mr. Levi of Cursitor Street?—I thought so. Here is a pen.” And Dashwood signed his name wherever the Behemoth’s finger pointed.

“Now, dear friend,” said the money-lender, “a bit of advice at parting. Press your suit. Remember your English adage, that faint heart never won fair lady. And now, good-bye, Sir Frederick, and good-luck to your wooing!”

## CHAPTER VI.

### MR. GOODEVE'S RETURN HOME.

HE senior partner in the very eminent firm of Goodeve and Glegg was, it has been previously mentioned, entering on a period of intellectual decadence, and by no means as good a man of business as he had been. No expert would, of course, be unreasonable enough to expect those family sollicitors whom all ladies regard as mines and marvels of legal learning, to know much of law. They do know, however, all sorts of things that it is very useful to know—when terms begin and end; what goes



before a Vice-chancellor, and what before a judge in chambers; and all about filing bills in Equity and putting in pleas at law; and which are the serviceable functionaries, masters, chief clerks, referees, and so on. In Mr. Glegg's view of the matter, old Mr. Goodeve occasionally made slips in these particulars, though at the same time continuing to appropriate the lion's share of the profits. There was also an imputation that Mr. Goodeve was unreasonably avaricious, considering the means at his disposal. The old gentleman was no doubt very well off; but, then, a man must be singularly fortunate, or unfortunate, if he does not find some one ready and willing to spend his superfluity for him. Such was the case with the attorney, who was a widower, living in an old house in or near Kensington, with an old maiden sister to keep house for him. His two daughters were married, and to husbands who had nothing beyond their pay, and

sundry olive-branches to provide for ; and Samuel Goodeve, who had been an indulgent father, and was now a doting grandfather, had plenty of employment for his spare cash.

Then, according to Glegg, his respectable partner was a trifle too saving—a species of crime and ground of offence to those who are apt to exceed in point of stylish expenditure. Mr. Goodeve was fond of walking. It did him good, he said, braced his nerves, and kept him from going too fast down the hill of time. In truth, the worthy man had still retained a share of personal vanity of a harmless kind ; and being tall, and having been considered well-looking and somewhat of a dandy in his youth, he yet affected somewhat of the air and bearing of a young man. You could see in the care with which he dressed himself, in the jauntiness of his walk, and the liveliness of his discourse when emancipated from the tram-

mels of the office, that he still fancied himself Beau Goodeve of the pre-Reform Bill epoch! There was nothing wrong in this; and after all, the aged beau, after walking part of the way, occasionally made out the journey from Bedford Row to Kensington with the aid of a cab.

The yellow sky had faded already from golden orange to a pale tint like that of the tawny wild cattle of our British breed, and was losing the last flush of its after-glow, when Mr. Goodeve found himself slightly fatigued, and still at some distance from his own abode. He began to hesitate as to whether he should or should not perform the rest of the distance on wheels, and ended by walking on, pausing at intervals to look into this 'or that shop-window, and always starting with renewed activity after each of these halts.

Behind him, at a considerable distance indeed, was a dark-featured young man, strong, swift, and as firmly bent upon his

purpose as the sleuth-hound on the trail of a deer. Now and then, when some favourable opportunity occurred of looking ahead from amidst a knot of the foot-passengers, Bruce Larpent ventured to step forth and satisfy himself that the feeble figure of his employer was still visible in front of him; but so soon as this inspection was over, he fell back as before. It would have been a grievous blunder to have allowed some accidental turning of Mr. Goodeve's head to enable that gentleman to recognize his faithful clerk, Daniel Davies, who had ostensibly gone home from the office hours since. Nearer by far to Mr. Goodeve was a loosely-hung young fellow in the attire of a stable-helper, and wearing a round cap of that pattern so much affected by the hangers-on of liverymen and horse-dealers, and he, too, regulated his pace by that of the eminent solicitor. Some paces ahead there slowly trudged along a couple of men, the

sturdier of whom, a light bundle flung over his shoulder, and clad in a suit of light-coloured slops, resembled a railway navigator on his way to begin a job; while the taller and slighter in build was in working-clothes, and, by the smears on his elbows, was probably a house-painter or whitewasher. On the opposite side of the road walked a shambling figure in rusty black, and carrying an umbrella, and this last-mentioned personage never once glanced ostensibly at Mr. Goodeve, at Bruce, at the stable-lad, or at the broad-shouldered "navvy" and his companion, the whitewasher, yet never once relaxed his stealthy vigilance as he pressed on.

It was growing dark. Mr. Goodeve was obviously getting weary, and he had cast more than one inquiring glance towards some passing omnibus, the conductor of which hailed him with upraised finger and sharp voice. But there was every prospect of his getting a cab that was crawling for

custom, and which might set him down before coming to his own door, by which he might save his character as a pedestrian. It was an unwise peace of vanity. Bruce Larpent, still heedful not to be seen, grew visibly anxious as he watched the irregular movements of his employer; and the man in rusty black stepped briskly out, shot ahead, and let his umbrella fall, stooping instantly to recover it.

Just abreast of the spot at which the man in rusty black had dropped his umbrella there was a narrow opening, as of a lane, court, or alley, where two dead walls swallowed up the yellow light of the street-lamp, and where no windows looked blankly out upon the passers-by. Farther on, doubtless, dwellings were to be found; but the mouth of the alley gaped, dull and blurred, as the half-open jaws of some monstrous alligator, seen in twilight among the cane-brakes, without a sign of life or movement within. Down this by-place,

the two men walking in front, the white-washer and the bundle-bearing excavator, unhesitatingly dived. So soon as they were well within it, the latter broke silence.

"Well, here it is at last. You get along as far as the corner there, and if a child comes, or a woman, try to scare 'em back. If it's men, give the office—d'ye hear? This'll serve my turn."

And so saying, he squeezed his brawny person into a narrow doorway that probably communicated with some rarely visited garden, about six paces from the mouth of the alley. Almost at the same moment the man in black came quickly across the street, and, shambling up to Mr. Goodeve, said, in a tone of respectful earnestness: "I beg your pardon, sir, for this freedom.—No, I'm not a beggar," he added hastily, for in London this form of address is usually the mendicant's prelude; "but I have followed you for some time,

without daring to address you, although I have that to say which is important to us both, I do assure you, sir."

"What can you possibly have to say to me, my man—of a nature, I mean, to interest me?" asked Mr. Goodeve, incredulously. The greatest city in the world is the one in which men come to be the most distrustful of strangers; and Mr. Goodeve was a Londoner of the pure breed.

"It concerns others, sir, than you and me," said the shabby man, with meek persistency, "and a client of yours, sir, most of all. You would be sorry afterwards, if you were to refuse to hear me."

The stable-lad was gazing admiringly at the blue crimson, and emeraldine bottles in a chemist's window, softly whistling as he gazed. Bruce Larpent, who had pulled out his watch, was comparing it with the clock conspicuous over the counter of a baker next door.

"You should come to my office, my



friend, if you really have anything to communicate," rejoined the lawyer, very stiffly. "You know me, of course?"

"Yes, Mr. Goodeve, well do I know you," exclaimed the shabby man; "and often, little as you noticed me, have I been to your place in happier days, with blue bags, and red bags, and forms of process. I was a quill-driver, though now obliged to get a living by odd jobs, and known to most about Gray's Inn Lane—Tooter by name, sir—and my employers once went so far as generously to promise me my articles. And I have been at your office, sir, two or three times; but, bless me! those young gentlemen wouldn't take in my humble name. It was: 'Oh, you wait till Mr. Glegg comes out!' or: 'Mr. Glegg, perhaps, will hear what you have to say.' Now, I do like to deal with principals, sir, and not understrappers."

A year or two before, had Mr. Goodeve heard his partner, Mr. Glegg, described by

the highly ignominious epithet of an under-strapper, and by such a one as the audacious speaker, he would have administered his severest rebuke to the offender. But vanity is very potent, and Glegg had snubbed his senior sorely, and Glegg had done his best to supplant him in the position of working head of the firm ; so it was music to his ears to hear his officious colleague thus contemptuously spoken of, even by such lips as those of Tooter, whilom of Gray's Inn Lane.

He did not care then to take up the cudgels for Glegg the absent, but mildly remarked : " Perhaps your best plan would be to send me a written statement of the case, whatever it is."

" I'm afraid, Mr. Goodeve, sir, I'd make a poor hand of that," said the other ; " but if you'd condescend to step aside with me one moment—just a step or so down this alley here, as it might be—to be out of the pushing street, I'd answer all your ques-

tions, and rely on your well-known sense of what's right to do the liberal thing by me when all is substantiated and cleared up."

Mr. Goodeve hesitated, as a good many thoughts passed through his head. Should he bid this man call at his house? No; for that might alarm Sister Hannah, and gossip among the servants—the stranger's outward aspect being such as is commonly associated with private inquiry offices, not with the residences of family solicitors. And at Bedford Row, the obtrusive Glegg might burst in upon him, and perhaps insist on lecturing his senior as to the etiquette of the very select branch of the profession to which they belonged. It was irregular—very irregular. But this long-necked, shambling person in mouldy black, and a wisp of dubious white about it, was very like a good many confidential clerks out of place—and confidential clerks sometimes have things worth hearing to tell;

and if Samuel Goodeve could steal a march on Glegg, and astonish him, why, matters might go more pleasantly in working hours. And the man was very well spoken and deferential, and he had called Glegg an understrapper. It would never do to show a want of energy before one who so well knew the difference between the head of the firm and his junior partner.

"I will hear, if you will be quick, and not dwell on irrelevant matter, what you have to say," was Mr. Goodeve's gracious announcement.

"Thank you, sir! If I do travel out of the record, I must rely on your superior legal experience to keep me to the point," returned the shabby applicant: and the two passed into the darkling mouth of the alley, and were swallowed up, as it were, by the gloom within.

Bruce Larpent had pocketed his watch, and was now somewhat at a loss for some ostensible occupation, when he saw the two

figures disappear within the shadow of the walls; and immediately afterwards the stable-lad sauntered forward, and stood at the entrance of the alley, chewing his straw with the same languid air of satisfaction as before. The dark young clerk could hear the low hum of voices for, perhaps, the third of a minute, from the gloomy space within the shelter of the walls; then they ceased. What was that? A cry—stifled in the very moment of its utterance, and succeeded by a gurgling moan, a sound of scuffling, the stamping of feet, and a crash. Then a dead silence—a horrid stillness, that contrasted painfully with what had gone before. Larpent's heart gave one great bound, and then so intently did he listen, that his very breathing was suspended. But no sound reached his ears. The stable-lad had shrunk back, as if to avoid observation, into the lane, and nothing was to be seen except a pair of Irish basket-women, with their heavy load of oranges,

plodding back from the suburbs of gentility to the brisker market afforded by the vicinity of the theatres, and the cabs and carts that rattled by at irregular intervals. The suspense grew to be almost more than the listener could endure.

"A cowardly business at best!" he muttered. "I wish, for my part, I were well out of it. Old, and sickly, and always kind, in his odd way, to me. But self-preservation is a law that overrides all others, and better as it is, than to stand in the dock."

He ceased speaking, for now forth from the alley came a lean, loosely-built figure in dark clothes, shambling rapidly along towards him.

"No questions," hissed out Craney, as he ran past; "off to the 'Birdcatchers,' but not by the same road as I take. Go by Sloane Street—I know a shorter cut."

And he was gone, darting up the nearest

by-street with the alacrity of a rabbit diving into a burrow. Bruce was, as it has been said, swift of foot ; but when he beheld the lamp of variegated glass shining in front of a villanous-looking Chelsea public-house, that bore the apparently innocent title of the "Birdcatchers' Arms," the many-coloured light fell upon the thin white face of the man in shabby black, the treacherous Tooter of Gray's Inn, and stained it with unnatural blotches of red, and blue, and orange.

"Hist ! there are too many chance customers inside here for any safe conversation," said Craney, panting, as he rubbed his heated brow : "come round the corner. There isn't a soul in sight."

And accordingly Larpent followed into a dark and deserted by-lane, where the two seemed as much alone together as if they had been in a desert.

"Is it done ?" asked Bruce, hoarsely, after two ineffectual attempts to speak. "I hope he's not dead ?"

"No, no—certainly not," coolly replied the more hardened miscreant before him; "but his doctor will have a tidy bill against him before he's patched up again."

There was a pause. Craney was the first to break it.

"We had better separate," he said; "we've been seen here together already; and there's a lot of half-bred young thieves here would sell their own fathers for half a crown. If you want me, a line to the old address will do. You'd better get home yourself, unless you like to drop in at bars and theatre half-price, first, and manage to make the people remember you. I can shift for myself. And now, sir, I'm a man of my word; and here's the banker's pass-book, and here's every scrap of paper—bar two flimsies for a fiver apiece—that we found in our man's possession. Good-bye to you, Mr. Larpent; and the best thing that can happen to you will be never



to see this precious countenance of mine again."

The pair of confederates then parted, the shabby man in black slinking through endless thoroughfares, where, beneath the blinking gas-lamps, he became but a unit in the congeries of shabby men in black; while Bruce Larpent, disregarding the recommendation to visit theatres and houses of entertainment, walked quickly homewards to Great Eldon Street. The work of that night weighed more heavily upon him than did the memory of that violent deed, which had made him, like Cain, a wanderer. *That* might be called wild justice, but this was blackest treachery.

Meanwhile, there was quiet—the quiet of the grave—in that sequestered alley whither Mr. Goodeve had in evil hour been induced to follow the too persuasive Tooter of Gray's Inn. It was not a place of much resort; but the police did occasionally visit it, and presently B 42, going his customary

round, stamped into the alley, and seeing a sort of elongated black bundle lying, with a white face upturned, upon the flags, drew his lantern, and turned the red lens of his bull's-eye on the prostrate form.

"Drunk and incapable," were the words which rose to his lips, and such was indeed the primary inference. Every person who has dropped down from the effects of sun-stroke, fits, or fatigue, is drunk and incapable, according to Scotland Yard philosophy, until the divisional surgeon and a coroner's inquest prove a shaking and a cell to be improper cures for apoplexy or asphyxia. But as he stooped over the supposed votary of Bacchus, B 42 caught sight of a long smear of something dark, and wet, and red on the wall beside which lay the helpless figure.

"Robbery from the person with violence!" exclaimed the policeman, brightening up immensely, as might a doctor who found a case of pitiful nettle-rash develop itself into

a spotted fever of the rarest and most medieval type. At once he stepped forth into the street, and, by signals, presently invoked the aid of a sergeant and three brethren of the belt and bracelet, by whom a stretcher was procured for the conveyance of Mr. Goodeve.

That luckless solicitor was picked up, a mere crumpled wreck of a man, a smear of blood on his right temple, little clots of gore staining his immaculate shirt-front, and marring the symmetry of his trim iron-gray whiskers. His pockets were turned inside-out; and his hat, which lay at some distance, was crushed and broken, but his name was written inside it; and his address was on the cards, in a plain little case of Russia leather, the only article of portable property which those who rifled him had flung disdainfully aside. He moaned feebly as they lifted him, and tried to put his hand to his injured head; but his eyes were closed; and though they bore him to the

chemist's shop close by, and tried to administer sal-volatile first, and then brandy, they could not get a drop of either stimulant to pass his firmly-clenched teeth.

“Watch, purse, papers, handkerchief, no doubt all gone!” said the sergeant, as he closed his note-book; “and that’s an ugly knock on the head; while you can see the blue prints of fingers on his throat, poor gentleman. Regular garrotting case, and old hands at it, no doubt. Let us get him home at once.”

Home they bore him then, and he was laid on his own bed, amidst the exclamations of his weeping household; and there he lay, breathing heavily.


“He won’t die, doctor, will he?” asked his haggard sister, hours after, when the surgeon came, with thoughtful face, downstairs, after doing all that skill could suggest.

“No, Miss Goodeve; I hope—I think that he will live,” answered the doctor.

"It is rather for his memory that I fear. A man of his time of life can hardly bear with impunity such a shock as this has been."

## CHAPTER VII.

### SIR FREDERICK'S WOOING.

OURTSHIP is, no doubt, an appropriate occupation for that season of leaf and bud, of green grass and peeping floweret, which we call the spring, and during which, according to the poet, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. Sir Frederick Dashwood was still young ; yet, as he repaired to the railway station for the purpose of urging his suit to his pretty and prospectively well-endowed cousin, his feelings were none of the most enviable. Perhaps love-making is one of the things which cannot conveni-

ently be done under the stimulus of that compulsion to which Sir John Falstaff, when likening himself unto a lion in the immortal tavern of East Cheape, so forcibly objected as a motive for less sentimental proceedings. To kneel at a young lady's feet because a man has debts that he cannot discharge, is not a resource likely to raise the suitor, in his own eyes, to any very lofty level; and to make proposals of marriage at the bidding of a money-lender, is surely ignoble. There are men whose dispositions lead them, when a course of conduct is inevitable, to devise all manner of excuses for what they are compelled to do; and so, by the time Sir Frederick had reached Richmond, he had worked himself up into a satisfactory belief that all must yet go well. Beatrice Fleming would never go back from her word.

"It's a mere marriage de convenance," he repeated to himself over and over again, as if, by incessant iteration, he could make

sure that Miss Maybrook would take what he called the "sensible" view of the position in which he found himself. As for Beatrice's happiness, or for the wrong done to her, he thought of it no more than some sportive child thinks of crushing the gold and azure wings of some gorgeous butterfly, the object of its chase among the flower-beds. He certainly did not intend to wantonly ill-treat her, and that, in his estimation, was enough for her.

• He was ushered into the drawing-room—not the yellow drawing-room, but that larger saloon, with blue hangings, which Lady Livingston preferred to inhabit when the winter seemed to be fairly at an end—and there, to his great relief, he did not find Violet. The dowager was there, however, in company with Beatrice, and a glance was sufficient to inform her what was his errand. Perhaps no man ever yet came to a house with the deliberate intention of proposing marriage to some one dwelling



there without his purpose being instantly known to every female who beheld him, from the housemaid peering over the muslin-blinds above, to the grandmother awaking from her doze in the chimney corner. Proposals of this sort are solemn things; and a little extra care in dress, stiffness of bearing, and anxiety of aspect, reveal the bashful swain's secret before he has uttered a syllable of his painfully prepared speech. The dowager saw plainly enough what was the object of Dashwood's visit, and it soon became apparent to him that she was not disposed to facilitate his having any private conversation with her young relative.

"I came here to-day," said Sir Frederick, making a virtue of necessity, "expressly in the hope that I might find my cousin Beatrice at liberty to walk out with me—round the garden would be enough, or the terrace, or the fountains, or anywhere—and chat for a little time. I have something that I particularly wish to say to her."

"Indeed!" returned the old peeress, in her coldest and proudest tone. "You and Beatrice walked out together not so long ago, and I did not see that my dear girl looked the happier for it when it was over. Anything that you wish to say to her, Fred Dashwood, may as well be said here, and in my presence."

Dashwood's face darkened. He set his teeth hard together, his breathing was short and quick, and the veins on his broad, low forehead, and the muscles of the strong but well-gloved hands that he clenched so instinctively, swelled like so much knotted cordage. We do not know—and it is well, perhaps, that we do not know—how often and how fiercely the Old Adam reasserts his savage animalism in those with whom we have dealings. Do you suppose that John Thomas, the footman—that big, tame man, that comely, well-whiskered fathom of strapping humanity, whom we buy in the flesh for board, lodging, liveries, powder-

tax, and fifty annual sovereigns—never longs to fling his noble employer, Lady Knagglebury, into her ladyship's own ornamental lake, beneath the plate-glass window of Rowtow House? Women are possibly of milder mood; but Abigail Pinworthy, lady's-maid these fifteen weary years of Italian ironing and hair-brushing, has been heard to express a burning desire to wring the neck of Miss Diggs, only daughter and heiress of that eminent colonial capitalist, playfully styled Old Diggs in Melbourne society, and who founded his fortune on gold, and completed it with wool. Sometimes, these unexpected effects, in the very best regulated families, are nearer to passing from theory into practice than is dreamed of by the object of so much smothered fury, and the would-be rebel gets no credit for an amount of self-control that would have done credit to a Stoic. Sir Frederick Dashwood, by an effort, kept down his [rising wrath, and made up

his mind that since he must speak, if at all, with this imperious old dame for an audience, he might as well do his best, and repress every symptom of irritation.

“ This is, to me, rather a formidable notion,” he said, with that smiling urbanity, neither self-assertive nor unduly deferential, which women commonly find it so hard to resist. “ I came down here to-day bent on telling Beatrice something that lies very near my heart, and I find myself refused a half-hour’s conversation with her. However, you, Lady Livingston, are the oldest friend I have in the world, as well as my relation ; and as I should have come to you the moment I had spoken to my cousin, I may as well lose no time in taking you also into my confidence. It is an old story, after all, that I have to tell. I love Beatrice. I have told her as much. It was her mother’s dearest wish that we two should marry ; and I have come to ask her to be my wife.”

The dowager smoothed out her rustling silks, and prepared to do battle; but she felt what the brave have often experienced, a not unbecoming reluctance to fire the first gun and begin the action. Determined as she was to repel the wolf from the fold, she found her task less easy when the lupine intruder presented himself as fraught with the most tender sentiments towards the lamb within.

“Nonsense, Fred! You are too poor to marry, and you know that as well as I do,” she said magisterially; and then she stole a glance at Beatrice, whose eyes were downcast, and whose slight tinge of colour was fading rapidly. That was all very well; but then Miss Fleming’s lips were quivering more than Lady Livingston liked to see, and her small hand had grasped the arm of her chair, as though in need of its support. This was a bad sign. The dowager knew that she must fight the matter out singlehanded, only hoping that

her principal might not end by disavowing her assertions.

“I am poor enough, I know; that is no secret, and now no novelty, Lady Livingston,” replied Dashwood, with seeming frankness; “but I have thought over very often, that idea that I must renounce matrimony by reason of my poverty, and I have made up my mind to ask Beatrice here to share with me the little I have. I shall not be the worse husband to her, or the less kind, because my home will be but humble, and my wife not a leader of fashion.”

“I don’t know that,” exclaimed the dowager; but she was ashamed of the rude words before she had well uttered them. “I mean,” she added hastily, “that this is the veriest folly. You are not a boy now, Fred, to imagine that a mutton-chop and a cottage represent an earthly paradise for two young people who never knew what it was to want for anything. And I am sure

that I do not see where you are even to find the means to pay for a cottage and a chop. Beatrice has nothing, or so little that it wouldn't clear your bill for cigars. You are sadly in debt—you have told me so twenty times; it would be sheer staring madness for you to dream of such a thing. —There, there! See, you have startled your cousin, taking her and me so completely by surprise as you have done, and made her cry” (and, indeed, the big tears were slowly falling from Beatrice's eyes, still downcast). “Be reasonable—there is a dear, good boy, and promise me to say no more of this, at any rate for the present, and we will go into luncheon, and—and——” And here the old lady paused. She had formed the sudden project of remunerating the obedience of her graceless relative should he prove docile, by penning him a cheque for a comfortable amount; and it was on the tip of her tongue to say so; but she did not quite like to tell even

such a man as Sir Frederick that she would give him money for desisting in his suit. Dashwood, however, had no notion of being put off with fair words and a glass of the old Madeira; and it may be doubted if any pecuniary gift would, under the circumstances, have bought him off just then. The recollection of his last interview with the Behemoth nerved him to pursue the contest, and he was, besides, of too manly a nature to drop his pretensions at the mere dictate of an old woman, even though she was wealthy and high in the world's esteem, and he disreputable and needy.

"I am afraid, my Lady Livingston," he said, setting his lips very firmly together, and speaking in measured accents, "that this courtship, of mine must be treated a little more seriously than it is your ladyship's pleasure to do. After all, my reference to you was a simple act of politeness to an old friend and relation, and the mistress of this house. It is to my cousin



Beatrice—to Miss Fleming—that I now address myself, and it is from her that I must receive an answer. Some short time since, I spoke earnestly to her on this subject, and have only delayed the renewal of my claim on her, founded on her positive promise, because the abruptness with which I spoke, appeared at the moment to distress her. I was in great difficulties—of course I mean about money—at the time, and——”

“And so you are still, unless you have found a gold mine,” interrupted the dowager, who felt that her strong point of vantage was Sir Frederick’s notorious insolvency. But Dashwood went on unruffled.

“Pardon me; such is not precisely the case. Matters are very much simplified of late; troublesome claims have been paid off, my affairs have been got into something like order, and it really seems as if brighter prospects were opening out before me. I don’t mean that I shall ever be rich; but a

modest competence does seem within my reach.—Beatrice, I ask you if you will share it with me? You know it was the dearest, the fondest wish of——”

“For shame, Frederick Dashwood!” broke in the old lady, now in a glow with anger. “You know and see that the girl does not care one straw for you; and yet, because your poor aunt expressed some feeling on the subject, you torture her with appeals to her sense of honour to compel her to marry you! It is a shame! It is unworthy of a man to persecute a poor young thing in this manner.”

“That is one way of putting it,” said Dashwood, with heightening colour and dogged resolve: “the other is, that Beatrice is my betrothed bride, bound to me by a solemn and deliberate pledge—a pledge which she did not venture, when last we spoke together, to repudiate. If I am to hear that promise declared to be

binding no longer, I must hear it from her own lips."

"I cannot—I cannot say so!" cried Beatrice in a low, sad voice, that sounded like a wail, as she clasped her hands together and averted her face. "I have not the courage, even to save myself from— No, dear Lady Livingston, it is useless. If he chooses to take me, I am his. My word was given, as he says."

"Dearest Beatrice," said Dashwood, and as he spoke he rose, and took her passive hand in his, "I don't want to make you unhappy—on my word, I don't. And I'll try and be a good husband to you, whatever opinion you may have been taught to form of me. I have been wild and extravagant, of course, and I have had to pay the penalty; but what I have done to incur Lady Livingston's enmity, and to be an object of dislike to you, is more than I can tell. I am cruel, very likely, because I insist on what cannot be denied to be my

rights ; but I cannot let the hopes of a lifetime be blighted for a mere whim."

But Beatrice, with an indignant cry, tore away her hand from his, and sprang to her feet, confronting him with a courage new to his experience.

"That you were hard and heartless, I knew already," she said, looking him fearlessly in the face for the first time ; "but I scarcely realized till now to what misery my poor fond mother had consigned me when she joined our hands in token of betrothal. You might have been content with what you had already secured, with my unwilling, most unwilling, acknowledgment of your claim, and have spared me that sneer."

The anger of a gentle spirit has in it that which affects us more, from its very rarity, than the loudest outbreaks of those who are easily moved to wrath. And this was felt by Sir Frederick, who now began to regret his own imprudent speech.

"I didn't mean any harm, nor did I wilfully offend," he stammered out awkwardly enough. "It is my misfortune that I am compelled to appear in an odious light, dear Beatrice, before you. You have heard my name traduced——"

"Not so, Sir Frederick Dashwood!" said Beatrice, interrupting his bungling effort at apology. "The opinion which I have of you is founded on what I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears. As for your well-known recklessness—about money, I mean—*that* would never have weighed with me, had I cared, really cared for you. It is not your poverty that repels me; it is the hard and cruel heart which cannot forbear from taunt and insult levelled against the woman whom, with lip-service and studied hypocrisy, he pretends to love—to love! Surely that holy word was never so desecrated before, as it has been to-day!"

She looked far prettier, speaking thus, in

her newly roused passion of scorn for him, than Dashwood had ever seen her look before, and he could not help admiring her, now that her eyes were sparkling, and there was an angry flush on her usually pale cheek. He had regarded her as a tame, spiritless slave, whose will would bend, reedlike, before his, and whose inclinations weighed for little or nothing in the balance. He now perceived that there was a fund of strength, undreamed of by him, lying hidden beneath that soft exterior, and that Beatrice, when she felt herself to be in the right, might not turn out to be the all-submissive wife on whom he had reckoned. She resented injustice now; she might one day resent neglect. But none the less was he resolved to hold her to her word.

- “I will talk this matter over with you when you are calmer and more disposed to listen to reason,” he said, taking up his hat; “at any rate, I do not relinquish one iota

of the rights which your pledge to me confers. I came down to-day——”

“You came down to-day, Frederick Dashwood,” said the old peeress, in a high shrill voice that trembled with anger, “to do a thing that you well knew to be mean, and base, and cowardly! Had this poor girl, who is dear to me as my own daughter, had a brother to protect her, you would not have dared to press this claim of yours upon her with such cruel effrontery as you have shown! Do you think that I am deceived by so transparent a trick as your counterfeit adoration or your mock-love for Beatrice? No, Fred Dashwood; it is my property which is the real bait for a needy fortune-hunter like yourself. You think that my affection for your cousin insures —— But hear me when I solemnly swear that no penny of my money, no hand's-breadth of my land, shall ever go to supply the wants or foster the vices of such a man as Sir Frederick

Dashwood!—You smile, do you? You confide in the old woman's doting folly to forgive the wrong you would do to Beatrice here, whose only fault is the blindness of her self-sacrifice to honour and truth, and the memory of her mother. You may compel her to marry you, and you may break her heart, but never, living or dead, will I enrich——”

She ceased speaking, for now Violet Maybrook's tall and graceful form appeared on the threshold. If she had overheard the dowager's last words, her power of commanding her own features must have been very great, so absolute was the graceful calm with which she entered. There was a moment of dead silence. Violet looked from one face to another, and the evident agitation of all present seemed for the first time to impress itself upon her.

“I beg your pardon, Lady Livingston,”



she said, "for what I fear is an intrusion. I had better go."

And she turned to withdraw, but with a quiet dignity of demeanour that might have graced a princess. Lady Livingston's nerves, however, had by this time been strung to such a state of tension that she broke through that icy crust of social decorum which imprisons us all more or less, and spoke her mind.

"Don't go, my dear. We have not been talking secrets. At all events, I, for one, do not care how many know the truth. Here is Sir Frederick Dashwood, your old acquaintance in Canada, my kinsman, to my sorrow—you know what he is—in debt to whoever is fool enough to trust him, picking up what he can anyhow, without caring whether there are tears or blood on the gold he pockets at the play-table,—yes, Fred Dashwood, I have heard of your cheating and robbing of beardless boys, though never did I 'traduce' you to Bea-

trice, as you falsely said—and bad and black as badness and blackness can be. Well, it seems Beatrice Fleming's poor dear mother had a wish that her girl and her sister's boy should come together; and so—and so—in fact there was an engagement and a promise that binds Beatrice, as a steel handcuff might do, but sits very lightly on yonder gentleman, I will be bound. Why, Violet, now I think of it, it is as likely as not he may have offered marriage, or something of the sort, to yourself across the sea there. You are a pretty girl, and it is possible.”

“Possible!” Violet said no more; but her tone and the light in her kindling eye were such as awed the old peeress into momentary silence. Dashwood broke in with an oath and a stamp of his foot.

“In the fiend's name, madam,” he said to Lady Livingston, “have you not done mischief enough? Was ever man worse treated when he came, honestly, to ask for

his own? You always hated me—hated me when I was a boy no higher than that table, though I own I am under money obligations to you, and be hanged to them! I'm not ashamed of what I have done to-day; and since you choose to take Miss Maybrook into your counsels—well, all I can say is, you shall not have a monopoly of outspeaking. There is an old engagement between Beatrice and myself—that's true. It was her mother's wish that we should marry—that's true too. I have come to claim the fulfilment of the promise, and I find myself received as if I were suspected of an intention to steal her ladyship's spoons. I'll be bound that I should have met with a different sort of greeting if I had been a smooth-faced, mealy-mouthed hypocrite like her ladyship's favourite, the model, the faultless man, that Oswald Charl——”

But now Beatrice, whose strength of nerve had been sorely tried, sank back,

half-swooning, in her chair, and her deathly-white face and her emotion were as a revelation to the baronet.

"That shot went home, did it!" he cried in coarse exultation. "This, then, explains the meaning of this delicate creature's shuddering repugnance, forsooth, to a man whom handsomer women have not thought quite so badly of! So, she was philandering with yonder fellow, was she, when she pleaded to me so prettily to release her from her solemn promise! I see it all now."

"So do I," said Violet Maybrook, stepping proudly forward. "Sir Frederick Dashwood, I congratulate you on the exquisite delicacy of your sense of honour, and on the exhibition of your noble nature with which you have kindly furnished us. At present, however, my best attention is due to Miss Fleming. You have reduced her to a fainting state, I see, and when she shall be fortunate enough to be

Lady Dashwood, we can imagine, I should say, what sort of wedded happiness will be hers."


And without another word or look, she turned away, and took Beatrice's cold hands in hers, chafing them tenderly as she bent over her. Lady Livingston rang the bell sharply.

"Show Sir Frederick Dashwood to the door!" she said; "he must never be allowed to pass it again; do you hear? He has insulted Miss Fleming—insulted me; and the servant who admits him forfeits his place as the penalty of disobedience.—I wish you, Sir Frederick, good-morning and good-bye;" and the dowager swept a courtesy in the grand old fashion of her youth. "While I live, you shall not cross this threshold."

"While she lives!" snarled the baronet, as he strode savagely down the carriage-drive. "That would not be overlong, I know, if a wish could kill!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN JEKYL STREET.

HE house which Sir Frederick Dashwood had inherited from his grandfather stood, it has been said, in Jekyl Street, and was a goodly mansion, though somewhat of a gloomy order of architecture. Jekyl Street itself once the favourite with men of rank and fortune, has sorely fallen from its high estate, nor do the bulk of its present inhabitants bear names familiar to the student of Dod or Debrett. But the houses remain, and they are spacious dwellings, with an allowance of elbow-room in their

broad staircases and ample drawing-rooms that might provoke the envy of many a resident in districts sacred to the newest fashion.

Sir Frederick passed very much of his time at his club, and certainly his inducements to remain at home were few, but it so happened that on the morning of the day following Sir Frederick's visit to the Fountains, and his formal proposals to Beatrice, the master of the house in Jekyl Street found himself at home. He was in low spirits, and "soda and brandy," though the soda-water was Schweppe's, and the brandy of the finest French vintage, had failed to drive dull care away. He had been trying to write; torn letters, or the commencement of letters, petulantly torn to shreds before six lines had been traced, strewed the table. He had been thinking, and that was worse, for there was little that was pleasant in his thoughts, whether of the past or of the present;

and as for the future, that lowered blackly before him. He had brought down his pistols, oiled them, and cleaned them, and felt the occupation to be some relief from brooding meditations. Was there not some surer relief to be drawn from the same source, he bethought him, as, click, click! he tried the mechanism of the revolver in his hand, and then glanced down at the neat row of cartridges waiting in their compartment of the baize-lined mahogany case! One touch of the trigger, and debts and duns, the Behemoth's tyranny, the avoidance of his worldly ex-associates, the pinch of poverty, would be as if they had never been! It was a temptation; but he would not yield to it. The leap in the dark was so terrible. The vague, undefined dread of an unseen world kept him from rushing into its unexplored domains. No; he must live while he could, and get on as best he might, but it was an



awkward position in which he found himself.

Surely all would be right in the end. The dowager had been very positive and very peremptory; but had he not often known instances when the most loudly avowed resolutions had come to nothing?

Yes; there must be some available method of turning the enemy's flank, and of becoming ruler, in right of his wife, over Heavitree and all its adjuncts. Beatrice had admitted his pretensions too often, and too explicitly, to go back from her word now. Perhaps the intervention of a third person would have efficacy with the old peeress. There were certain friends of his mother's yet alive, and who gave him from their carriages a cold bow of recognition when he rode in the park. Of these, the most distinguished was the Marchioness of Blunderbore, at whose house he had been a frequent guest, until he got to vote her parties slow; and she, the mar-

---

chioness, was a soft-hearted woman, with the ordinary instincts of a matchmaker. Should he go to Brobdingnag Square, and enlist Lady Blunderbore on his side? With her for an ambassadress, he might bring the autocrat of the Fountains to hear reason. And she would help him, if he went frankly to her. He was sure of that. The marchioness was of more malleable stuff than was the Duchess of Snowdon. Her Grace of Snowdon was of another mould. Her, he would not have dared to approach. On his return from Canada, she had cut him dead, once and again, not in the nervous manner in which matrons of inferior station feign elaborately not to see a man whom they will know no longer, but without any sign of doubt in those cold, clear eyes of her. No; the duchess and some other dames had weighed him, and condemned him, and nailed him, morally, to the social counter, as a bad shilling, a dull, useless, leaden impostor,

whose base metal should pass current no longer. But good-natured Lady Blunderbore would give him another chance.

"A lady, Sir Frederick!" murmured the old butler, breaking in upon his master's reverie.

"A lady, you fool? What lady, and what does she want with me?" snapped out Dashwood. He was often rough with the old servitor, who had drawn so many corks for his grandfather, the founder of the Dashwood family, although it must be remembered that, through the race of Flemings to which his noble mother had belonged, Sir Frederick could count kindred with many magnates who would scarcely, under the severest cross-examination, have been induced to own him as a cousin. But at this moment the lady entered, throwing up her veil as she did so. It was Violet Maybrook, whose stern beautiful face was revealed.

"Oh, all right—didn't expect," said

Dashwood, hurriedly rising—"You may shut the door, Buzwing."

But Violet did not take the chair which the baronet offered her, and put aside his proffered hand with a gesture of quiet contempt. Then she cast her eyes around, taking a cool and composed survey of every object in the room—the pictures, the well-worn Turkey carpet, the heavy furniture, the cumbrous clock ticking on the black marble of the chimney-piece, the incredible monstrosities of Georgian porcelain that flanked it—a brace of Arcadians in china tending impossible sheep in ridiculous attitudes, but which had once been lauded as "equal to anything those French fellows could turn out from that Sèvres they brag so about"—the vat of an inkstand, the gilt-handled fire-irons, the Books of Beauty, the pistol-case, the torn letters. "It is natural," she said bitterly, "that I should like to make myself acquainted with what should have been my home. The house

may be shut against me, very probably, when Miss Fleming is your wife and its mistress. This is—— Pray enlighten my colonial ignorance—it is not a library, and hardly a drawing-room.”

“It’s only the room in which the governor—Sir George—used to see his patients,” he replied, reddening, for he was not fond of being reminded of the medical origin of his title; “and I sit here merely because I must be somewhere in this old prison of a house.”

“It is not a cheerful dwelling-place,” said Miss Maybrook, continuing her survey; “a very Temple, I should say, of Ugliness. Here, then, you and your cousin are to play at love in a cottage? May I be occasionally admitted to witness your domestic felicity?”

“Violet!” he exclaimed, fixing his eyes full upon her face. “What could I do? Put yourself in my place for one instant. What could I do?”

"You could keep your word, perhaps," answered Miss Maybrook with cruel composure. "You have had a lesson read to you on that point. Here is Beatrice shuddering at your very touch, yet ready to go, like Iphigenia, to the sacrifice, from pure unselfish inability to face the consequences of a lie. Have *you* no pledge to bind you? Do you, in truth, belong to yourself? Is there in the world no woman who has bartered every hope of heaven for your love and your plighted faith, and who is scarcely one to allow herself to be cheated out of the price of what she has given up?"

"Be rational, Violet!" Dashwood began; but she silenced him by a wave of her hand.

"Be rational!" She repeated his words scornfully. "Never does a man tender that advice to a woman save in extenuation of his own selfishness. It is not to our reason that you appeal when you would win us.

The jilted love, the cast-off mistress, are bidden to be rational, to take a sensible view of the conduct of him who has grown tired of his toy, and would fling it behind him for ever! What is it to me that you would find Miss Fleming's fortune, when she gets it, a convenient life-buoy to which to cling after the wreck of your own prospects; or how can you expect me gracefully to withdraw from the scene in your favour? It is for you, Sir Frederick, to speak your mind upon these points. Mine you know already."

"And you are welcome to the truth, if you will hear it," said the baronet, walking slowly to and fro, with downcast eyes and knitted brow, as is the wont of many men when some unwonted emotion master them. "I'm bad enough, and too bad; but you are harder with me, Violet, about this matter than is quite fair. You don't suppose that I would not sooner marry you, if only I could, than fifty such girls as that pale

little thing at the Fountains! It is sheer beggary, the worst beggary of all, that of a gentleman who never in his life learned to earn an honest sixpence, which goads me on. I sell myself for a maintenance. Women do that every day, and you don't judge your own sex so very harshly when they marry to secure a roof over their heads and bread to eat. It is only when a man does the same thing that you call him vile and mercenary. As for my promise to you, how am I to keep it? The announcement in the *Morning Post* of 'Marriage in High'—no, but 'Fashionable Life,' as I am only a baronet—yes, of a wedding in which the principals were Fred Dashwood and Violet Maybrook, would be as fatal as a death-warrant. I do believe the Behemoth—you don't know of whom I talk, a money-lending Jew baron, to whom I belong as completely as this flower in my button-hole belongs to me—would have me arrested as we walked out of church, on



the very steps of St. George's, Hanover Square. Fellows can be tapped on the shoulder and clapped into gaol on mesne process yet, in the old way, if a creditor chooses to swear that they are likely to flee the kingdom. And, grant that I am left at liberty, how would you enjoy your life as Lady Dashwood, without credit for a gown-piece or a hired brougham, dunned at one moment, denied at another, until you came at last to feel every 'No, my lady,' or 'Sorry to refuse your ladyship,' as a distinct insult, and grew to loathe the jingle of your useless title? *I* do, I know that. Nobody addresses me as Sir Frederick without something of a covert sneer at the pranked-out pauper whose very servants are his creditors, and who eats, drinks, and sleeps on sufferance."

He was very much in earnest now, and his very voice gave evidence of his sincerity.

"You should have thought of all this

long ago," she said, reproachfully, but in a voice that was perceptibly softer than before.

"How could I?" retorted Dashwood, sullenly. "How could I guess that the doting old miser would leave nothing worth mentioning behind him? If I had only looked forward to this one short year ago, I should not have been quite so eager about the succession, and Charley might——"

"Hush! There are names that must not be spoken, lest they wake the dead!" interrupted Violet, so wildly that Dashwood stared at her aghast, as if doubtful whether her reason remained unshaken. "You had better let me forget, if I can, the innocent face of the boy that loved me well; the sunny eyes that laughed as they met mine; the golden curls that lay, all drenched and wet, upon the pillow, when the searchers came home at last to lay their light burden in the little cot where he had slept in life! Your careless words, Frederick, conjure

up more visions before me than it is good to remember."

"You are agitated, Violet, and hardly know what you say, my girl," said Sir Frederick, whose bronzed cheek had blanched to an unusual pallor. "I beg your pardon, I am sure, if I was inconsiderate in my speech. But I can't—no, hang it! I cannot pick my words at such a time as this, and baited and harried as I am. You see that pistol-case? Well, five minutes ago I sat hesitating, with a revolver in my hand; and, on my word, I think I was a fool not to end my troubles by a touch of the trigger. What have you come here to do? Not, surely, to upbraid me? I am miserable enough without that. Or, perhaps, it was to threaten? You can ruin me, of course, and might not care very much for consequences; but I am getting so weary of my life, that I might as well lose it in one way as another."

"As if the loss of life were all!" ex-

claimed Violet, with glittering eyes. "How would you confront the ordeal that goes before death—the horror, the hate of all men; the pitiless stare of a crowd greedy of a new sensation; the curses of the mob, as a surging sea of human beings boils and seethes around the——"

"I cannot bear this!" burst out Dashwood, with an oath. "Do you want to force me to marry you, under a direct menace to drag me down with you to despair and death, unless I yield up my own free choice in the matter? I may as well know it at once if this be so. You have my promise——"

"Your written promise, Sir Frederick," said Violet, more composedly than before; "worded, as you know, at my dictation, and which is the talisman by which I can mould you to my will. If I like to hold you to your bargain, I can, by a fearful forfeiture, compel you to fulfil it. Why should I be content to wait, to remain what I am, Miss

Maybrook, companion to the right honourable old woman by whose kind permission I have leave of absence for a few hours? You would fail to understand me, Fred, if I told you that it was my womanly pride that proved your stanchest safeguard, after all. I won't drag a husband to the altar. I will not say to a man—at least to-day, for women are variable in their moods, you know," she added, with a laugh, of which the tone was not a mirthful one—"you must own me as your wife, or die upon the scaffold. I hardly know now what was my purpose in coming here to-day. Had I found you as you once were, with your old air of languid, high-bred indifference to all earthly considerations but your own comfort, I might have been irritated into doing what I should afterwards have been sorry for. I do care for you a little, yet—often as I have striven to tear the imprint of your false, fair face from this ungoverned heart—often as——"

She said no more, but there were bright tears shining in her proud eyes, and Dashwood felt some sparks of the old love rekindle in his own heart as he saw them.

“Look here, Violet, my darling!” he said, springing to her side, and passing his arm around her waist; “if you’ll take me as I am, I’ll be as good as my word. The dowager, and the dowager’s property, and Beatrice, and the Behemoth, may all be whistled down the wind, my girl, for aught I care. Come, we’ll be married, and go abroad before the thing is blown, and trust to better luck and our own wits for the future. Who knows but—such things might be—I might not become a decent fellow, with your help, at the last!”

Why did not Violet’s good angel, if, indeed, as Asiatics dream, such a spirit were whispering in her ear, give her counsel that should override the advice of that other angel, armed by her pride, to whom she

hearkened, or why did she not take the man at his word ?

For the moment, he was sincere. For the moment, he was scarcely selfish. Later on, no doubt, he would have repented of his sudden choice of poverty, and the companionship of this beautiful and daring girl, who had given such terrible proof of her fondness for him ; but for the moment he was ready to give up all for her sake. But she was angry with him, angry with herself for the weakness she had displayed ; and with the waywardness of her sex, she shook herself free from his hold.

“ I came here for no dalliance,” she said, “ no love-passages. I meant to assert my rights, and to remind you of my power ; and I have done both. Whether I shall exact the fulfilment of the bond, or release you from it, and leave you to ignoble ease as Beatrice Fleming’s mate, and king-consort of the Heavitree estate, rests with myself, and with me alone. And now I

must go back to my dull round of daily duties."


And with scant ceremony of leave-taking, she departed. When she got back to the Fountains, she found a strange bustle and agitation prevailing in the old house, commonly so peaceful and well ordered. The door stood open; the servants' voices were loud in the hall.

"Something must have happened!" she said, as she hurried in.



## CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE BLINDS ARE DRAWN DOWN.

ADY LIVINGSTON, it may be remembered, had the reputation of being eccentric, and was beyond doubt capricious, as ladies of her age, and in the uncontrolled enjoyment of ample means, are apt to become. Consistent as she was in her unswerving affection for Beatrice, she was none the less prone to take fancies, as the colloquial phrase has it, to strangers, and to be pleased for a time with new faces and modes of speech. She had at first shown a marked partiality for Violet Maybrook, and now she was

disposed to think favourably of a very different person — Aphy Larpent. This young lady had for some little time past been accepted in the character of Miss Fleming's music-mistress, and she had spared no pains and neglected no artifice whereby to ingratiate herself with the old peeress. Hence, it came about that when the piano was closed and the morning's lesson over, the little girl from Canada, who sang like an angel, and whose deportment was always simple and modest, was invited to remain for some hours as a guest in the house which she frequented professionally. That Miss Larpent should be included in the dowager's domestic circle, was in the highest degree distasteful to Violet, her former friend ; but to remonstrate would have been useless and impertinent, nor was it safe to arouse suspicion by any hint as to the antecedents of Lady Livingston's new favourite. The elf herself felt a thrill of secret triumph as she

took her seat at the dowager's table, and was permitted to associate with those who, had they known the truth, would have shrunk from her contact as if she had been plague-stricken. She had little fear lest by some untoward accident her history should one day be revealed. The two who knew it, Dashwood and Violet, had sufficient motives for their silence, nor was it probable that any one conversant with colonial scandal would enlighten Lady Livingston's ignorance on that head.

It is uncertain what motives predominated in inducing the sister of Bruce Larpent to exert herself, as she unquestionably did, to conciliate the aged and wealthy kinswoman of her gentle pupil. Something was due, no doubt, to the gratification which she experienced in thus forcing her company on Violet, on the early friend whose avoidance had humiliated her, and of whose superiority she had been jealous since the days of their childhood. But

this was not the only impulse. Her native cunning, sharpened by the difficulties of her position, had urged this little Ishmaelite to neglect no opportunity of learning a secret or of winning the confidence of those above her in social standing. Therefore, she voluntarily discharged, for Lady Livingston's behoof, many of the duties which ordinarily fall to the lot of a salaried companion, writing letters at her dictation, examining accounts, and executing scraps of necessary but monotonous background in some gorgeous piece of Berlin wool-work, the credit of which would belong to her noble employer.

It fell out, not unnaturally, that on the day which succeeded that stormy scene which had ensued on Sir Frederick's formal proposal for the hand of Beatrice, the music-mistress found Miss Fleming in no mood to profit by her instruction. Her headache, which she pleaded in excuse for a day's idleness, was more genuine than the

conventional *migraine* of fashionable society often is, and the very sight of her pale, sad face proved to the observant elf that something of note had occurred ; nor was it very difficult to form a conjecture which at any rate came near to the truth. Violet, who had obtained permission to visit London, was at that very moment on her way to Jekyl Street, and Aphy willingly undertook to be Lady Livingston's attendant sprite until her return. The dowager was herself in a condition of nervous excitement, which only work could appease, and had persuaded herself that it was of immense importance that she should be portentously busy in clearing off an arrear of correspondence.

The dowager's custom was to write, or to cause to be written, such letters as she despatched, in her own room, so-called, in the west wing of the nabob's stately mansion. There was so much of unused space in that great house, that had its mistress

been so minded, she might have had a half-dozen of studies or libraries wherein to pen her epistles. But women, of whatsoever rank, have a preference for the chamber that is their own peculiar realm, and Lady Livingston conformed unconsciously to the practice of the medieval dames, the best part of whose life was passed in that "bower" which we moderns should unpoetically designate as a bedroom. Where does Clorinda indite those gushing epistles to dear, darling Araminta, and those others, on scented pink paper, to Captain Spurrier, whose betrothal ring—he is a sad Bluebeard, in his platonic fashion, that Spurrier, and has given away turquoise circlets by the dozen—shines on her "engaged" finger? Where does Ethel pour those delicious confidences into the sympathetic ear of Rose (christened Rose Matilda, but who has modified her name, by the same right innate which caused Ephraim Bugg to blossom into

Norfolk Howard)? Women are not quite as men are, despite the shrieks of malcontent Amazons, and it is not, therefore, wonderful that Lady Livingston should have preferred her own especial room.

It was a pretty room, large, if low, and with flowering-plants clinging to the bricks outside, and pouring their fragrant breath through the open window. It was furnished in a more cheerful style than was old Sir George's house in Jekyl Street, and it opened into a dressing-room almost as large as itself, and which contained many and many a quaint relic of the days of Lady Livingston's youth. There were the antlers of a highland stag that "my lord's" rifle had laid low in days before no gentleman's education was considered perfect until he had "done" his deer-stalking, and piled up hecatombs of slaughtered grouse on the purple heather of the North. There were presents given to her long ago—marbles from Florence, mirrors from

Venice, tinted glass from Prague ; here a matchless carving in old oak, stolen from some Flemish church in the Revolutionary wars, and sold for a handful of five-franc pieces to some English "milor" on the grand tour ; there a jar of such ancient porcelain as Tae-pings and gunboats have hardly left unbroken on all the seaboard of China, sent "with respectful compliments" by some first-officer of an Indiaman who owed his appointment to "my lord's" influence. There, too, stood a grand structure, a cabinet of tortoise-shell and ivory and satin-wood, mounted in gilded brass, and in excellent preservation. This had been a post-nuptial gift on the part of "my lord" himself, and his relict prized it highly ; and to that hour used it as the hiding-place of her very choicest possessions, the letters of dear friends, the old, old trinkets, each perhaps with its own associations, that spoke only to herself, and other treasures.



Lady Livingston was very busy. She not merely dictated, but actually wrote, letters to several persons—to her steward, for instance, at Heavitree, to Goodeve and Glegg, of Bedford Row—her ladyship being as yet quite unaware of the serious mishap which had befallen the elder of those eminent solicitors, and which had, through the exertions of Mr. Glegg, who dreaded the circulation of reports damaging to the firm's prosperity, been kept from newspaper publicity—and to other persons. The elf, on the other hand, was kept well employed in balancing sundry complicated accounts. The dowager, like many people of abundant fortune and leisure, paid her tradespeople but at long intervals, although it would have been equally convenient to her to have drawn a cheque weekly to defray her expenses. On this occasion she showed an odd eagerness to clear herself with the world, sending the ready Aphy on em-

bassies to Mrs. Hart, and signing first one order on her bankers, and then another.

"I must be ready—I must be ready!" she repeated to herself, under her breath, although she had no need for such anxiety, having a large balance of available money, and none but the usual liabilities of a large establishment.

Miss Larpent, who watched her stealthily, could guess that she was under the influence of some haunting thought, that she was intent on exorcising by the spell of active employment. It was evident that she was ill at ease. Hers was an unnatural briskness for a woman of her years. Her eyes were bright, and there was a flush on her wrinkled cheek, but she looked ill and harassed.

"I wish, my dear," said the old peeress suddenly, addressing Miss Larpent—"I wish, my dear, that you would fetch me from the tortoise-shell cabinet a packet that you will find—let me think—in the second;

no, in the third drawer on the right-hand side, below the large inner compartment where the jewel-case is kept. I have not seen it for years and years; but you will know it at once—a packet of letters tied up with a broad blue ribbon. Here is the key," she added, "of the cabinet; and here"—selecting another glittering morsel of steel, with an ivory label attached to it, from amidst the heap of keys which lay upon the desk before her—"is that which unlocks the drawers. Would you mind the trouble of giving me, in that glass, fifty drops from the bottle?—Thank you. What set my head running on those poor old letters, I wonder?" she added; but now she was communing with her own thoughts, not addressing the young teacher of music, who continued to pour out the medicine, as desired, with a steady hand. The fifty drops fell one by one into a modicum of water at the bottom of a wine-glass; and, Lady Livingston, taking the glass from

Aphy's hand, swallowed the contents. "It always does me good," she said, with an air of satisfaction; "more good than I ever derived from any prescription of Doublefee's. It is very well for men like Sir Jbseph to call these people quacks. They do something for us, doctors or no doctors; while the Faculty only watch us as we die by inches, in the regular way."

From which it may be opined that the phial on the table was prepared according to the recipe of some irregular benefactor of suffering humanity.

"Shall I go for the packet now, Lady Livingston?" asked the smiling elf; and receiving a nod by way of reply, as the old lady dipped her pen in the ink, and recommenced her self-allotted task of writing, she went on her errand at once. The tortoise-shell cabinet stood, it has been already explained, in the adjacent dressing-room, and the door between the two rooms was partly open. Both the keys being labelled,

and one of them larger than the other, Aphy Larpent found no difficulty in opening the miniature double doors, and in inserting the key in the third of the small lower drawers, on the right of the central compartment, where stood a large case of crimson morocco leather, with silver mountings; doubtless the jewel-case of which mention had been made. But the third drawer, when opened, proved not to contain anything but some old trinkets, broken or obsolete, an amethyst cross, a necklace and bracelets of Maltese filigree-work, some dozen rings and brooches of small value, a watch set with small diamonds, a string of pearls yellow with age, and a gold chain, to which was attached a locket.

“She spoke of the second drawer; let me try that,” murmured Miss Larpent to herself, as she closed the one drawer, and applied the key to the other. What was it that met her gaze, causing her eyes to flash and glow with an unholy eagerness, and

her fingers to contract themselves crisply, like the claws of a bird of prey about to pounce upon the quarry? Why did her sallow cheek redden, and her vulpine mouth become compressed, as she hovered around the open drawer, where, however, there was nothing which at first sight appeared very tempting to be seen? She was still gazing, when Lady Livingston called out impatiently: "You are a long time about it, Miss Larpent; surely you can tell one key from the other." The young music-mistress withdrew a step or two from the cabinet, and stood in the open doorway, looking into the other room.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "but I think there was some mistake. I tried the drawers on the right side."

"But I told you the left side, distinctly told you the left," cried out Lady Livingston, irritably. "You young folks are all alike, with no more memory than if you were so many wax dolls. There, there, my dear,

I did not mean to scold; but please be careful now, while I finish this note. The third drawer, mind, to the left; I told you so before."

The dowager like many of the aged, was tenacious on the subject of her own memory, and sometimes unjust to those whose more accurate recollections jarred with her own; but Aphy Larpent knew her habits too well to contradict her; and with a mere, "Very well, Lady Livingston," she turned to fulfil her senior's behest. As she did so, with a covert smile on her lips, she looked back. There sat the old peeress, stiffly erect, writing at her huge old-fashioned desk of ebony, with her black lace lappets falling beside her gray hair, her dress of rich brocade, in some pattern of black and lilac, the diamond rings flashing on her soft old fingers—stately to look upon. Miss Larpent never afterwards forgot that sight.

The third drawer on the left being opened, disclosed to view a miniature in

its case, a broken fan, some ivory tablets—such as were used in bygone ball-rooms, by beauties long departed, to register the names of partners no longer in the flesh—a few dried flowers, and some eight or ten old letters, the ink of which was faded, and the paper discoloured by age, but which were tied carefully together, as the dowager had said, with a broad blue ribbon. The ribbon—it had lain long in the drawer, and was itself a faded thing, the ghost of a blue ribbon—was tied in what is called a true-lovers' knot; nor was it hard to guess the nature of the correspondence which it enclosed. Love-letters, doubtless, and probably not penned in his bachelor days by the Right Hon. the Lord Livingston; to whom, nevertheless, their recipient had been a true wife. There is some romance, perhaps, in all lives, prosaic as they may appear; and perhaps the miniature, and the dried-up flowers, and the shattered fan, and the tablets, and the letters, were all relics of



certain early days when her ladyship had dreamed of happiness with *him*, never destined to be more to her than a half-forgotten shadow of her girlish life, and budding sentiment. Aphy took out the letters, and turned back to re-enter the other room. There sat the old lady, the pen in her hand, and her face bent down, apparently writing.

The old peeress must have been intent upon her task, surely, for she paid no attention to Miss Larpent's entry, or to the—"I have brought the letters, Lady Livingston," with which the girl announced the execution of her errand. Aphy, who had now reached the middle of the room, suddenly started back, with dilated eyes, gazing on the seated figure in the arm-chair. The figure had fallen forward a little, and the pen, still held between the fingers, had slipped awkwardly across the sheet of letter-paper, making a long irregular mark, like an inky furrow, but not a straight one. The weight of the body seemed to be supported

by the other arm, and as Miss Larpent gazed, it gave way, and dropped forward, the down-turned face resting on the desk.

“You are ill! In the name of Heaven! what is this?” exclaimed the elf, startled into momentary sympathy with the supposed sufferer, to whose assistance she sprang forward. But the hand that held the pen was nerveless; there was no beat of pulsation in the wrist on which the girl’s grasp closed; and when she lifted the heavy, helpless head, involuntarily she recoiled, for the glassy eyes, the awful grayness of the blanched face, the parted lips, the motionless features, told their own tale. There was to be no more suffering, no more care, no more anxiety for Susan Beatrice, Dowager Baroness Livingston, on this earth of ours. And Aphy Larpent knew, and shuddered to know, that she was alone with the dead.

It may have been five minutes later than

the instant of making this discovery, or possibly the interval may have been somewhat longer, before Miss Larpent took measures to spread through the house the alarm of the sudden death of its mistress. Perhaps, with all her audacity and her resources, the shock had overpowered her nerves, and she had needed a brief breathing-time before she was capable of thought or action. As it was, after a pause, which, after all, was of brief duration, the sharp and repeated sound of the bell brought hurrying feet along the corridor of the west wing, and in the doorway, the servant who first arrived was met by the young teacher of music, who was very pale and trembling, with tearful eyes and uplifted hand, that told its own tale before a word had been spoken.


“Very ill—her ladyship—very ill indeed—the nearest doctor,” said the elf, gasping; and there was hurrying to and fro, and shrieks and sobbing of women, and the

loud exclamations of men ; and in an incredibly short space of time a messenger returned with Dr. Eccles. His examination did not last long, and every one knew the verdict before he uttered it. "It is all over, and I can do nothing : the heart, of course ; I always feared as much," said the young doctor. "You had better lay her on her bed, poor thing, and darken the room."

And that was why the blinds were already drawn down when Violet returned from London.

## CHAPTER X.

### DUST TO DUST.

HE grim visitor, Death, throws a tinge of solemnity over surroundings that would otherwise be little else than frivolous or commonplace. The few poor yards of thin black woollen stuff, nailed around the door of some French cottage-home, plead quite as pathetically for the respect due to the mourners within, as do the costly draperies, gorgeous with coronets and armorial bearings wrought in gold thread, and studded with ostentatious tears embroidered in silver, which the rich and noble hang around the church-porches of Paris.

A philosopher might have denied that there was ground-work for any especial repining at the obsequies of the Dowager Lady Livingston, which were duly performed at Richmond, on the day dictated by custom, by a corpulent undertaker who had buried many of her ladyship's kith and kin. Here, it might have been said, was a person of ripe, nay, of over-ripe years, who had enjoyed, more or less, the good things of this world so long as it was possible to retain them, and had met with a painless death in the fulness of time. There was no reason for taking a sentimental view of the matter. The tenancy-for-life was over, the banquet-board swept clear; it was the turn of another now, and that was all. Nevertheless, there were tears shed for this rich old matron, who, in spite of occasional ill-humour and spasmodic imperiousness, had yet found out the way to win the hearts of her dependents. The old coachman, who had growled out, scores of times, his caustic

comments on her fickleness of purpose and sturdy determination to be obeyed, now led the chorus in her praise. "Though she was dead," he declared, surprised into quotation for, perhaps, the first time of his life, "her name would never die;" and he was very severe with helper and stable-boy for whistling irreverent nigger melodies while his and their good mistress lay in in her shroud within the house. Of the other servants, half were really sorry; and the other half, led away by the infection of grief, mourned for their lost lady during all that interval between the death and the burial. There were pensioners of the old peeress, too, who had good reason to grieve, but whose regrets were not purely selfish.

Beatrice Fleming it was on whom the blow fell the most heavily. For days she sat in her room, as if stunned, so sudden, so cruel, had been the stroke which Fate had dealt her, as she deemed, when her protectress, her best, truest, dearest friend,

she who had been to her as a mother, was snatched away. She hardly had realized what Lady Livingston had been to her, how the spontaneous affection of that childless old woman had shielded her from the rough storms of the world, until the kind old hand that had given so much was for ever powerless. Beatrice reproached herself, though without reason, as we all are apt to do, of not having been more tender, loving, thoughtful, in her intercourse with her who now lay hushed and still on the couch whence her own strength should never raise her. She took blame to herself that in her natural unhappiness, when persecuted by Dashwood's unwelcome suit, she had not marked the signs which should have told her how near her benefactress was to her end. But in very truth the blame was undeserved. Only the eye of an expert, sharpened by deep anxiety, could have detected the secret approaches by which the citadel of life was undermined.



That Lady Livingston had died, with fearful suddenness, of heart-complaint—that Miss Larpent had been, not precisely in the room, but in that adjacent, executing some wish of the dowager's, when the fatal seizure occurred, was well ascertained. There was mute evidence, no lack of it, that the mistress of the Fountains had been cut off whilst in the midst of her ordinary occupations. The letters, the accounts, remained on the table just as the writer had left them. The very ink in the pen which the dead fingers held was scarcely dry when the servants had been called into the chamber of death. And when the outcries and the frequent iteration of "Who would have thought it?" had ceased, it appeared that the lamentable event which had just occurred was exactly what every one, with unanimous prescience, had always expected.

A good many people took thought of Beatrice Fleming and of her prospects.

What would she do with Lady Livingston's money, now that it was hers? That she should live in single blessedness at the Fountains or at Heavitree Hall, was, of course, out of the question. But where would be her residence until the day of her marriage, and who would be the fortunate winner of such a prize matrimonial?

"She is very nice and pretty, and the Heavitree property is quite unencumbered," said the Most Noble the Marchioness of Blunderbore; "and then she has birth too, not that men seem to care a straw for that nowadays, when there is money or notoriety, and she ought to do exceedingly well with herself. I did hear some ridiculous rumour that she was engaged to that bankrupt baronet, a cousin of hers—I forget his name. Oh, Dashwood. Yes, yes; that is it: a handsome, good-for-nothing young fellow, grandson to the old doctor, Sir George. But I am sure dear good Lady Livingston would never have tolerated

such a preposterous love affair as that. The man is hopelessly involved, and can't show his face in society, and who set such a mischievous report afloat, I cannot tell."

It was the Behemoth who had circulated the particular report which had reached Lady Blunderbore's ears. Rumour seems generally, like the thistle and fungus, to be self-sown; but in this instance Baron Swartz had condescended to propagate in London circles the true story, with which he had by some mysterious means become acquainted, of Beatrice's betrothal. There were many who did not believe in an anecdote which it was to the Jew's interest to spread abroad, and among them was the Duchess of Snowdon, who regarded it as simply incredible, that a young woman who had seen something of London should throw herself away on a suitor whose only recommendations were his good looks and the bloody hand in his escutcheon.

"A baronet is all very well when he happens to be rich," her Grace had said, when she was informed of Miss Fleming's supposed promise to her disreputable kinsman; "but she can be called 'my lady' on less ruinous terms. It is a pity, of course, that she will be in crape for some time to come, because she loses the best part of the season, but I shall make it a point to invite her to stay with us in Scotland afterwards, and I dare say something satisfactory will occur." And the duchess was warranted in her vaticinations by the fact, that not a few brilliant marriages had resulted from such visits to Inverinch Castle, N.B., the northern palace of the Duke of Snowdon, where eldest sons and young men of fortune were to be flushed as readily as the close-packed broods of grouse nestling amid the adjacent heather.

Among those whose interest in Beatrice was the keenest was, as was but natural, Sir Frederick Dashwood. But as, when

he sent in his name, Miss Fleming "regretted that she was not equal" to the ordeal of a personal interview, and as he received no reply to his clumsy letter of condolence, the sympathetic baronet was compelled to postpone his intended consolations to his cousin under her present affliction until the day of the funeral. In the meantime, it was profoundly irritating to him to overhear, as he so often did, the babble of the young subalterns at his club, some of whom "happened to know" that Beatrice's heritage was about fivefold in excess of the amount first stated, the Heavitree rent-roll being roundly summed at twenty thousand a year, with "another tenner" of annual thousands from the Consols; while others freely gave and took the odds that the sorrowing heiress would marry, and into the peerage too, before Ascot in the following year. Any event will serve as a peg on which bets may hang, and a young lady's wedding may be

as fair a subject for a sporting wager as any other ; but the chatter of these pink-faced boys drove Sir Frederick to the limits of his patience. He had not asked, when he drove down to the Fountains, to see Miss Maybrook, being exceedingly dubious as to the reception which he might expect from her. She was capable, as he well knew, of acting with forbearance and generosity on occasion. But there was at least an equal probability that her fiery spirit might lead her to disregard all consideration for her own security, should he test her endurance too severely. It would be better to wait, and if she chose to be a calm and contemptuous spectator of his union with another, to accept the position with the best grace possible. He should at least have a sufficiency of solid pudding to compensate for the lack of praise, and could bear the scorn of the only woman he had ever loved, and the aversion of his wife, for the sake of an assured income.

He was quite willing to reconcile himself to the stalled ox, even with the bitter seasoning of domestic hatred, rather than to continue his present life of shifts and expedients.

Very busy was Mr. Glegg, of Goodeve and Glegg, family solicitors, of Bedford Row. He and a steady old confidential clerk were daily for hours at the Fountains, searching into the contents of all manner of receptacles for documents, docketing, comparing, inspecting, putting seals on desk, press, and drawer, and being strangely busy and silent. By this time it had oozed out into print that Mr. Samuel Goodeve had been the victim of a "violent and outrageous attack" in the public streets, and was still very ill in consequence of the brutal treatment which he had received. At any rate, all the work of the firm devolved upon his partner, who was not unnaturally testy at the sudden strain upon his powers, so that he was barely civil to

bland Mrs. Hart, the housekeeper, and promptly silenced the old butler's deferential speeches. In truth, the whole household burned with a blameless curiosity as to the contents of "my lady's will." Of course everything went to "Miss Beatrice;" but that cardinal rule once established, there was room for doubt as to the testamentary provisions. Was there a clause forbidding Miss Fleming's marriage with the obnoxious Sir Frederick, under pain of being disinherited? Would the property be vested in trustees, or go "out and out," to borrow the language of the tallest plush-clad Mercury, to the heiress? That there would be gifts of money and raiment to the denizens of the basement story, was reasonably held as assured. That annuities would be bequeathed for the maintenance of the oldest servants, was deemed more than likely. It was a disappointment when Mr. Glegg's gruff reticence cut off all information on these heads. As for the confidential clerk,



when the butler did once succeed in inviting him into the commodious pantry, where a cobwebbed bottle and large glasses were in readiness, even the mellowed fire of that royal old Madeira, once laid down by Lord Livingston defunct, failed to loosen the tongue of that smoke-dried subordinate of the Law. "The green seal was thrown away on him," so the butler declared, almost with tears; "four glasses—for the fellow sucked in four of 'em, mute as an oyster—didn't warm him up one bit."


There were other mutes ere long in attendance at the nabob's red-brick mansion, which had been stealthily pervaded, of late, by the satellites of that fashioner who purveys for us the last of our earthly requirements. There had been creeping and whispering, and smothered noises as of muffled tools cautiously at work, and all the hush and suppression that usage prescribes, until the preparations were complete for burying the dead out of sight. Then at last came the

black horses, prancing in their decorous sleekness and strength, beneath their dismal load of sable finery, and the hearse with nodding plumes, and the black coaches, and the well-trained men in Death's black uniform, whose practised grasp is so familiar with the embossed silver handles of coroneted velvet-covered coffins. And so did they bear away, in decent pomp and staid ceremony, the body of the late mistress of the Fountains to its long home beneath a marble monument, in a flower-planted inclosure well railed in ; and the chaplain of the cemetery yielded precedence to a more dignified clergyman than he, one of the noble family of Fleming, who had come down to read the burial-service over "our dear sister departed."

The last honours had been duly rendered to the dead. It was time, now, for the arrangement of the affairs of the living. Wherefore, the reading of the will at the Fountains was awaited with a very real anxiety.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CONCERNING THE WILL.

HE reading of the will, in the case of a rich and childless testator, is in itself a subject so dramatic, that it is by no means surprising that more than one powerful pen, more than one deft and dexterous pencil, should have embalmed for pictorial or literary immortality a scene so worthy of the limner's or the narrator's art. In some cases, the wishes of a wealthy miser, of a petty tyrant at enmity with his children, or of a fanciful spinster, are so little known, that the ceremony partakes of the character of an actual Wheel of For-

tune, of a lottery, wherein the great golden prize may fall to some humble Cinderella, to some clownish Cymon, as yet of no account in the world. There are instances in which the last will and testament tells no more than the so-called Queen's Speech, which is the formal prelude to a parliamentary session; where Amurath and Amurath succeeds, as the merest matter of course, and the only concern of anybody is, as to the pitiful little legacies that, like a comet's attenuated tail, are tagged to the foregone conclusion that the bulk belongs to the expectant heir.

The company of mourners gathered together in the great solemn dining-room of the Fountains was not at all such as a skilled playwright would have placed upon the stage. If there was Avarice present, it was not embodied in the form of a sour old bachelor kinsman, or a rat-eyed female cousin, wealthy already, and ravening in ghoulish greed for legacies to swell the

hoard. Luxury was not there, incarnate in the shape of a rakish young gallant, confident that his luck must change this time; nor were the rest of the seven deadly sins as prominently sponsored as they sometimes are. Even Sir Frederick Dashwood, who was there, with crape hatband and mourning attire, like the others, expected nothing, unless it were some trifle to buy a ring. There was one first favourite, and all the rest were dark horses, as he put the case, in the freedom of social life, to Major Raffington. It was a comfort that the old dame had not had time to frame a codicil barring Beatrice from taking him, Fred Dashwood, as her husband. He had not the least objection to leading an indolent life thenceforward, on the ample income of his future bride.

There were, in addition to the clergy of the parish, to the doctors, and to the lawyer, sundry others, more or less akin, for the most part, to the stock from which the



er to associate with the handsome, eyed spendthrift, whom the dow- rumoured to have turned out of e the day before she died, but nventional right to follow her to , and to hear the announcement st wishes, none cared to dispute. egg, followed by his confidential latter being laden with papers, tling into the room, and rubbing s together, took his place at the .very one expected him, in com- ith established usage, to make a ark or two, before opening the then to unfold the potent docu- lf. But Mr. Glegg appeared to nervously ill at ease than became of his standing. He cleared his peatedly, shuffled with his feet, ver the papers which his sedulous ced before him, and finally said, pishly: "Gentlemen, I am afraid ave not the power of performing

what I had anticipated as part of my—yes, my regular duty on this—ahem! melancholy occasion. I see you are impatient, and naturally so, and I will not, therefore, detain you longer. I cannot read the will, since, up to this moment, there is no positive proof that any such will exists.”

There was a murmur of incredulous astonishment, swelled by the respectful, but distinct murmurs of the servants clustered near the door of the great ghostly room.

“No will!” cried the Hon. and Rev. Augustus Fleming, he who had read the service over the dowager’s coffin, and who readily undertook to become spokesman for the rest. “Why, the thing is impossible.” So said the looks of the spectators, as clearly as looks could speak.

“I am sorry, gentlemen,” said Mr. Glegg, looking about him, “to be compelled to repeat my previous assurance. I have searched, and so have the clerks, everywhere at Bedford Row, but in vain. The



most minute scrutiny here has led to no better result. I do not in the least mean to deny that a will was, very recently, executed by our deceased client, and I have no doubt in due legal form. Mr. Goodeve, my partner, saw to the drawing of it, and superintended its signature—thus much his day-book proves. But there is no discoverable trace of the will itself.”

Then there was a babel of uplifted voices, where all seemed to speak at once, and none to listen. It was terminated by the butler's coming forward to the table to relate, with respectful firmness, all that he knew, that is to say, the approximate date of the arrival of Mr. Goodeve and his clerk, their being closeted with Lady Livingston, and the presumed signature of what the household had never hesitated to pronounce a will. This narrative bore with it the stamp of truth, yet Mr. Glegg smiled faintly, as he shook his head.

“I am sure you are convinced of the

accuracy of what you relate, my worthy friend," he said magisterially; "and yet the account, however morally convincing, merely serves to show what loose ideas of evidence take possession of the popular mind. My partner, a clerk, and some papers, arrive here; a statement which is important, certainly, but which offers *per se* no tittle of proof that a will was signed and witnessed. Jumping at a conclusion is not a logical process, though laymen argue daily as if it were. Now, it unfortunately happens that Mr. Goodeve, whose failing health and impaired powers as a business man had for months been a source of no light anxiety to me, did not make a formal entry of the particulars, but merely jotted down one or two disjointed memoranda, barely intelligible. From these I gather that a will was drawn up, and signed; and I conclude that it was of a short and simple character, and for this reason; no barrister, contrary to our custom,

seems to have sketched it; and indeed the entire instrument was probably prepared by Mr. Goodeve himself, from which circumstance I gather that its provisions were not elaborate, as they must have been had trusts and contingent remainders formed any part of it."

"Well, but where is this will—long or short?" demanded Dashwood, almost fiercely. "If it is not here, it must be at your office, Mr. Glegg, and it is for you to produce it."

"That is very easily said, Sir Frederick," coolly returned the lawyer; "but I cannot be responsible for the safe custody of a document which I have never seen. You may be sure, gentlemen, that I have not come here to-day to make the disagreeable communication which I have made, without having used every proper effort to discover the missing will. All Mr. Goodeve's papers, whether at his private residence or in Bedford Row, have been examined with

the utmost care ; nay, every box of title-deeds and bundle of leases belonging to our other clients have been ransacked and tested, in the vain hope that my partner may have inadvertently placed this important paper in some one of them. Here, at the Fountains, the same care has been displayed, and again without result."

There was a fresh chorus of exclamations, more or less suggestive.

"It is considered more regular, is it not," said the Hon. and Rev. Augustus, "that a will should be kept at the offices of the solicitor who drew it? I have always understood this to be the case."

"There is no binding rule where wills are concerned—as to their keeping, I mean," replied Mr. Glegg; "though, no doubt, they are more secure when in professional and disinterested custody. But etiquette does not, as in the case of marriage settlements, dictate their being consigned to the care of a third party. My own impression

has always been that Mr. Goodeve left the signed will in Lady Livingston's hands, but I admit that this is not based on any testimony."

"But you have searched here, and carefully too?" said another member of the family, a distant kinsman, who had nothing to lose or gain by the result of the quest, be it as it might.

"I have done so, with the assistance of my clerk," said Mr. Glegg emphatically, "placing seals on every receptacle that contained papers, which seals remain—as I have this day satisfied myself—intact, and which, I may mention, also secure some valuable jewels and other portable property. I found everything apparently in good order. I have investigated every scrap of writing that belonged to the testatrix, and I can make affidavit that the will, unless concealed in some hiding-place so unlikely as to elude conjecture, is not under this roof. It is not at Mr. Goodeve's

house. It is not in our offices in Bedford Row. My partner is not, as you are perhaps aware, in a condition to give coherent answers on any——”

“But the clerk,” said Dashwood, striking his hand upon the table, and lifting his voice,—“the fellow he brought down here with him! why on earth don’t you get the truth out of him? He must know all about it.”

“Your tone and manner are offensive, Sir Frederick Dashwood,” answered Mr. Glegg, reddening; “and if you had had the patience to wait till the conclusion of my few remarks, you would have been spared the trouble of putting the question which you have asked. That the clerk in question witnessed the old lady’s signature, I believe. I believe, too, that he can be identified. The butler has spoken of him as a dark young man of somewhat short stature. We had such a clerk, until two or three days since, in our employment,

and he was often in attendance on Mr. Goodeve. His name was Daniel Davis, and he lived in Great Eldon Street. He has disappeared, both from Bedford Row and from his lodgings. There can be no moral doubt but that he has absconded."

"Then he has taken the will with him; that's plain!" cried half-a-dozen voices at once.

"Pardon me," said the solicitor, with an incredulous movement of the shoulders; "I very much doubt that, and for the simple reason, that I do not believe he could have got it into his possession. Documents of that importance are kept by us in fireproof boxes, with Bramah or letter locks to fasten them, nor do any of these appear to have been tampered with. And we can account for the flight of this Davis without any such far-fetched supposition. He had been trusted by Mr. Goodeve—then in declining health—to pay away and to receive moneys to a very

injudicious extent, and there are proofs that he has scandalously abused my partner's over-confidence. It is probable that the apprehension that, since Mr. Goodeve's late accident, his papers and accounts would pass under other eyes, has been his real motive for taking himself off. I do not think we need suppose him to have burdened himself with booty so useless to him as this will would be."

There was a pause. Every one stared blankly in the face of his neighbour. The lawyer, after a moment's breathing-time, went on: "If Davis could be found, and if he could be induced to speak, no doubt he could establish the facts as to where the will was bestowed after its signature. As yet, the police have no clue to his retreat, nor are we at present in a position to apply formally for a warrant, if they had."

"I think," said Oswald Charlton, breaking silence for the first time, "that two things, and two only, may be considered



to be proved. A will was very recently executed, and we cannot reasonably doubt that it was in Miss Fleming's favour. That is one point. The other is, that this will has disappeared in a very singular manner, when we couple its disappearance with the street-attack on Mr. Goodeve, and the absconding of the clerk. Mr Glegg will excuse me if I suggest that the presumption is against the hypothesis of this document's having been left at the Fountains, and that very grave suspicions rest upon this person Davis, or whatever his name may be, however slight may appear to have been the motive for purloining the will."

Then again did everybody speak at once. There was scarcely one present who was not able to aver that the dowager had made no secret of her intention to leave her property to Beatrice. The old servants could speak to hints innumerable on this subject. The steward of the Heavitree

estate, who had travelled to Richmond to attend the funeral, loudly declared that he "had it in black and white, under her ladyship's own hand, that Miss Beatrice was to come after her" in the enjoyment of that compact estate. Doctors, friends, and kinsfolk were all in the same tale as regarded the testamentary intentions of the old peeress. But still the prudent Glegg demurred.

"Pray don't misunderstand me," he said; "I quite agree with you up to a certain point; but as, unluckily, we are not able by acclamation to put Miss Fleming in the position of residuary legatee, we are obliged to take, as the law does, a cold and practical view of the affair. There was a will, and we all believe that we know its general purport, but it has not yet been proved to be still in existence. Mr. Charlton has seen enough of litigation to enable him to bear me out when I say that the caprice, the fickleness, and the dilatoriness of testators

keep the hands of those who administer justice pretty full. Unless we can find this will, it must be concluded that Lady Livingston herself destroyed it, probably with the design of making another of a somewhat different nature, and that death surprised her before she could carry out her scheme."

"And in that case?" gasped Dashwood, on whose forehead a dark frown had gathered.

"In that case, legally speaking," returned the solicitor, "our client has died intestate, and everything goes to the personal representative and heir-at-law."

"And that is John Fleming!" exclaimed the Hon. and Rev. Augustus, in dismay, and his remark was echoed by several voices in such a tone as to indicate that the said John would not be by any means a popular selection for the vacancy. After this, there was an end of any coherence in the assembly, which broke up into knots,

sipping wine moodily, and enunciating opinions of more or less pungency on the event of the day, and so by degrees dispersed. The servants were almost in a state of mutiny against that impassive abstraction called the Law, and which, to members of the class from which they sprang, assumed the character of a distinct antithesis of Justice. That "Miss Beatrice" should lose the fair inheritance which had been so notoriously designed to be hers, was in itself sufficiently monstrous; but it was an aggravating circumstance that this should redound to the benefit of John Fleming, "which my lady always hated, the covetous, creeping creature!" said indignant Mrs. Hart the housekeeper; "and to think that he should come to be master here is enough to make her turn in her grave, poor dear!"

But Dashwood's anger was fiercer and more unreasonable than that of any there. "It's a rascally plot!" he said aloud,

---

after tossing off glass after glass of sherry; "and if you think, Mr. Glegg, that the matter is to end here, you never were more mistaken in your life, that's all!" But though he had insulted the attorney, and had passed scowling through the company gathered in that banqueting-room, cheerless enough now, he had Black Care to sit behind him on his road back to London, and fury, remorse, despair, gnawing like vultures at his heart. To have thrown the dice once again, and lost! It was almost more than he could bear. What mattered it though Beatrice were faithful to her word, when this fatal disappearance of the will made her no longer a prize worth the winning!

## CHAPTER XII.

### A CHAPTER OF POLICE.



R. GLEGG'S announcement to the assembled mourners at the Fountains had been, as regarded the continued illness of his partner and the disappearance of Daniel Davis, substantially true. Samuel Goodeve lay helpless and useless in his bed at Kensington, while the dark young clerk had ceased to occupy his accustomed seat in the office, and Bedford Row knew him no more. That he had abused the confidence of his feeble employer, seemed tolerably certain : but then Mr. Goodeve's memoranda had been left

in so dislocated a condition, and his attention to business had of late been so lax and irregular, that it was hard to say where carelessness ended, and where fraud began. The most damaging circumstance that could be adduced against the clerk was his absence. Had he presented himself as usual at his desk, and met Mr. Glegg's investigations in a spirit of apparent candour, that gentleman could not easily have done more than dismiss him from his situation. Even as it was, the detectives with whom Mr. Glegg took counsel quite coincided with the irate solicitor as to the necessity for caution.

"We must give him plenty of line, sir," said Sergeant Flint, who was reputed at Scotland Yard to see somewhat farther into the metaphorical millstone than most of the Force. "An action for false imprisonment wouldn't suit your book, Mr. Glegg, would it, now? We may think that some of those signatures—the endorsements, I

mean—are forgeries, but how are we to prove it to the satisfaction of a jury? Mr. Goodeve can't step into the box to swear to his own pothooks and hangers, and between you and me, a verdict can't be looked for on the evidence of experts. Bless you! if one of those professional *pensters* comes forward to testify to the up-stroke of a *t*, another of the lot is ready to stake his fifty years' experience that it is the down-stroke of a *g*. They are like the mad doctors, and have got themselves a bad name by being too clever by half. I'm afraid there is but one chance. If we could mix him up with that garrote business, then we could put salt on the bird's tail, and no mistake."

But Mr. Glegg was lukewarm respecting the assault which had been committed on his senior partner, and by no means shared the eagerness of Sergeant Flint, the cause of which he was quite able to comprehend. The newspapers had been very severe in



their strictures on the police for not having prevented, or promptly avenged, the audacious attack of which Mr. Goodeve had been the victim. The police are pretty well used to sharp criticism, whenever an evil-doer eludes detection, but this had been a very glaring offence, and the "Daily Lime-light" had come to the front with more than one so-called 'slashing' article, calling on ancient Rome or modern India to lend Londoners a vigorous administrator for a day, and demanding wherefore British Thugs were permitted to ply their calling in the Brompton Road. There was wrath beneath braided surtouts, and anger among those who had stripes on their sleeves, and ponderous boots encasing their protective feet. Our blue-coated guardians, Argus-eyed and Briarean-handed as we expect them to be, are, after all, but mortal men. It is highly creditable to their sagacity that some suspicion should have fallen on the Ugly One, but then the person concerned

shared that honour with a good many others "known to the police." There was nothing to connect Craney's accomplice with the actual assailant of Mr. Goodeve. There were other members of the body-politic as ruffianly as he. But there was an ardent desire in Scotland Yard to serve up some sacrifice at the altar of Justice, and hence the inclination to connect Daniel Davis with the attack on the eminent family solicitor.

Mr. Glegg's view of the affair was of a common-sense, commonplace sort. His partner was a moony, maundering old fool, who had somehow mooned and maundered himself into the clutches of one of those gangs of prowling miscreants ever on the watch for the unwary. No particular trap had been laid for Mr. Goodeve—merely some snare adapted for the confusion of a rich and silly wayfarer. Davis was simply a rogue, who had taken advantage of the credulity of his weak employer, but who

had made off as soon as he perceived that a more vigorous and vigilant administration of the business of the firm would jeopardize his security. To have punished the fellow would have been well, and a good example to other hirelings; but it was absurd to mix him up with the garrotting adventure, or to countenance the monomania of the police for seeing in the most unlikely people the perpetrators of every undetected crime.

Detectives have this much in common with the demons which medieval sorcerers were wont to invoke by unholy incantations, that it is easier to summon than to lay them to rest. The sergeant and his brethren were by no means satisfied to gauge their views of duty by Mr. Glegg's standard, and accordingly they persisted in prying into all imaginable nooks and corners, conversing with the most incongruous persons, and beating any and every covert where they conceived the game to lie, as yet without

any very notable result. Sir Frederick Dashwood presently became conscious that his movements were liable to an amount of observation that was anything but flattering or agreeable. When he descended the club-steps, he could not help remarking to himself that the fellow lounging and chewing the stalk of a flower beside the stately portico of the opposition club, two doors off, had been lounging and chewing there with equal placidity two hours ago. The same faces were very often to be met with as he walked the streets. Near his house in Jekyl Street there seemed to be always some slinking figure at the corner of the approach to the Mews. By gaslight, or by daylight, eyes appeared to be continually taking note of his actions. And, before long, a card was brought in to him as he sat smoking his cigar in the old consulting-room, where Sir George would as soon have indulged in opium or bhang as in that tobacco the use of which, in his young

days, was voted vulgar and degrading, save in the form of snuff. The card was thus inscribed—"MR. SOL. STARKEY, *Supt.*"

"Who is the fellow, and what does he want with me?" demanded the baronet, loftily; but in truth he guessed readily enough the calling of his visitor.

"I do think, Sir Frederick, he comes from the police," said the butler, dropping his voice, and turning up the whites of his expressive eyes; for the police, and those who seek them, or are sought by them, are objects of suspicion and mysterious horror in every civilized land.

"Dash his impudence! what can he want with me?—Show the man in, will you, gaby! I'll make short work of him," was Dashwood's rejoinder; but in spite of the swaggering air that he assumed, he felt by no means at his ease as Superintendent Starkey came clanking into the room, made his stiff semi-military bow, and took the chair to which Dashwood pointed.

"And what, pray, may be your business with me, Mr.—Mr.——" began the baronet, glancing at the card that he held between his thumb and finger.

The visitor merely made another wooden bow, and chuckled behind his stock. He was in person a tall man, much taller than Dashwood, and had a high head, sloping upwards to a point, shaggy eye-brows, a long upper-lip, and restless eyes of a gray colour. His blue surtout was accurately fitted and well brushed, and, indeed, from head to heel he was the perfection of neatness.

"*You* know, Sir Frederick. Don't tell me! A man of the world like you!" he said, as if in explanation of the chuckle.

"I can make a good guess at your profession, my worthy friend, if that is what you mean," he said; "but what you can possibly have to say to me, is more than I can conjecture. I haven't lost a pet terrier, nor has any area-sneak stolen my spoons, so

I have yet to learn to what I'm indebted for your visit."

"If it had been as you say, Sir Frederick Dashwood, baronet," returned the visitor, "you would have had a look-up very likely, but on the part of quite another class of officer. My time is considered too valuable to be squandered on spoons, let alone dawgs." But still he did not seem in any hurry to elucidate the object of his coming, but sat chuckling, and with the forefinger of one glove rubbing the crown of his hard and heavy hat, with his mobile eyes now resting on Sir Frederick's watch-guard, now lifted to his face. Habit is, as we know, a second nature; and the police of all countries come to imbibe a certain Orientalism of deportment, as adapted to their imperative mandate. They like to talk in parables, to speak by winks and nods, to do anything rather than say in plain language who they are and what they seek. A French gend'arme, in reality as

simple-minded a giant as ever wore jack-boots, yet practises a mysterious frown and sidelong leer that indicate a subtle knowledge of something to the discredit of every stranger he meets. F 93, young man from the country though he be, assumes oracular airs as he stands on the door-mat, lantern in hand, and would prefer to communicate with Paterfamilias himself on the subject of front doors left ajar by night. The stars of the profession outdo their tacit assumption of importance, and Superintendent Starkey, who was an orb of the first brilliancy, prided himself on his diplomatic skill, and usually appeared as if to have been Capidji Bashi to the Sultan, and gone about with bowstrings and death firmans in his pocket, would have been his true vocation.

"You'll save your time, if it's worth what you say, by not wasting any more of mine, Mr. What's-your-name," said Dashwood roughly.

"Solomon Starkey, your most obedient,



Sir Frederick," said the detective, who was not easily offended. "I must ask you, though, Sir F., to show a little indulgence, just a little, for the difficulties we meet with. You see, Sir F., whatever happens, we are blamed—we are. I do believe some people, especially in the daily press, take us for a kind of nuss-maids that ought to prevent the public from coming to any sort of grief—they do. And yet, if elderly gentlemen will go and get throttled and robbed, and documents get lost, nobody guesses how, and queer folks come over—from Canada, or where not—to play their little games——You know something of Canada, if no liberty in asking, Sir F.?" he added more abruptly, for he had noted that Dashwood winced slightly, but perceptibly, at mention of the Dominion, and he was quick to score a point against a possible adversary.

"I was quartered there with my regiment, as I daresay you have heard," replied Dashwood with a yawn; "and what you are

talking of, unless it be about the assault on the old lawyer, Mr. Goodeve, is Greek to me."

"But that was an odd business, wasn't it, sir?" put in the detective. "An orderly, methodical gentleman like Mr. Goodeve, a Londoner born and bred, to be trapped as if he were a yokel out of Somersetshire, that happened to make friends with some generous-hearted chap, who stood glasses of ale and showed a fistful of sovereigns to all he met. What made him go out of his regular road, I wonder? It does look 'put up,' don't it? You knew that young man Davis, or Larpent, very well, out in America, I believe, Sir F.?" And again the concluding words were rapidly uttered.

"Knew him well! Not I, by Jove! mere casual acquaintance," returned Dashwood; and then his colour deepened as he regretted the unguarded admission. "What have I to do with this matter? I suppose you do not suspect me of garroting the old attorney, do you?"

Superintendent Starkey was immensely tickled by this idea. "No, no, Sir Frederick," he answered: "that job was too neat for any but professionals, though there may have been an amateur in it, along with the regulars, too. But it was uncommonly kind of you, knowing so little of this clerk of Mr. Goodeve's, to take the trouble to hand over such a lump of money to his sister—wasn't it, Sir F.?"

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Starkey, or whatever your name may be," said Dashwood, rising wrathfully to his feet, "I'll not submit to espionage and impertinence of this sort. If I am to be badgered and cross-examined, let it be done in a court, and by a lawyer. I am not accustomed to be persecuted by the police, and, except under legal compulsion, will not endure it." And so saying, he rang the bell violently.

"No compulsion, no compulsion at all, Sir Frederick Dashwood, baronet," said the detective, very mildly; "we only hoped

you would be willing to do what you could to further the ends of justice—that is all. Good-morning, Sir F.” And he followed the butler out of the room, and left the house without more words.

Yet Solomon Starkey, superintendent, and, in his own branch, a man of much renown, was satisfied with the result of his well-spent half-hour. To be dismissed as an intruder, is, to a veteran protector of the public, merely a trivial instance of the general ingratitude. He knew, and all policemen know, that half their work is done in virtue of the ignorance, the folly, and the timidity of those with whom they come in contact. An Englishman's house is so far his castle, that the veriest burglar, without a ticket-of-leave, could drive forth from his attic the smiling man in plain clothes before whose minatory forefinger he sits shaking in his highlows. The detective had no writ of summons, that could compel Sir Frederick to enter an invisible witness-

box, and yet he had succeeded in extracting from him two or three admissions of considerable import.

“Started, first of all, like a jibing horse, when I named Canada,” said Superintendent Starkey, telling off the points on his own large-knuckled fingers. “Two roads go, I reckon, from that post. Was it because of Davis, *alias* Larpent, and his sister? Or was it on account of something he has been up to over there? Well, well, I must not draw it too fine. Anyhow, he knows a sight more of that brother and sister than he cares to tell. He gave her the money, a heap of it, as I learned; and why? Landlady couldn’t say. I don’t for a moment believe that he gave it for the sake of that sallow little creature with the odd-coloured eyes. She’s no great shakes for looks; and the baronet has got two flames already, as I gather, one with property—one, from Canada too, without. Yet, he as good as owned to it that Mrs.

Gulp was correct as to what she saw through the keyhole. Not bad, to be screwed out of a tetchy, ill-conditioned chap like him, yonder." And he jerked his thumb towards Jekyl Street, which was by this time left behind, as the active and intelligent officer passed on northwards.

Superintendent Starkey was bound for Great Eldon Street. He was not seldom in Great Eldon Street just then, and the brass-plate inscribed with the name of Gulp was as familiarly known to him as is the façade of St. Peter's, at Rome, to a builder of churches. Maria Gulp, with her brevet rank as Mrs., the better days that she had seen, and the degradations which she daily underwent on account of the truant proclivities of her undisciplined maid-of-all-work, had become as so much plastic dough in the hands of the police—a lump of soft material that would take any impress. "Give her liquor, and mix it with peppermint for the spasms, and listen, stirring her up with a leading question when she woolgathers, and

you may get anything out of her," had been the joint verdict of Sergeant Flint and his colleague, Mr. Starkey. And indeed Maria, under such influences, bleated out all that she knew or imagined concerning her lodgers. It is true that she said three words of the noble Downies and the past glories of Hardup for every one which she uttered concerning Bruce and his sister; but policemen are patient, and there was some gold in the dross. Mrs. Gulp had acquired, whilst at Hardup Hall, an amiable custom of making herself acquainted with the private affairs of her betters; and though there is a prejudice against information acquired by applying the ear and eye to keyholes, or by investigating the contents of unemptied pockets and unlocked dressing-cases, perhaps such irregular proceedings may be pardoned to the unpaid servants of that slippery peer, Lord Diddleham.

There was small encouragement to pry, in Great Eldon Street, into the concerns

of people so insignificant as an attorney's clerk, and his sister, who taught music. But then there had suddenly dawned on that cramped horizon a vision of splendour. A live baronet, whom the landlady could remember as hunting with the Hardup hounds, and tossing off foaming bumpers of the dry champagne which the Earl of Diddleham economically preferred, for continual consumption, to the country ale for which it was harder to get credit, had come to visit Miss Davis, whose personal appearance and claims to the possession of beauty Mrs. Gulp rated as only one woman can estimate those of another. "There's no sweethearting in this case!" had been Mrs. Gulp's comment, as she kept surreptitious watch on the interview. The experienced eavesdropper was perhaps somewhat out of training, or spirituous consolations, too often resorted too, had joined with age to deaden the keenness of her organs, but so it was that she learned little.



The good sound grain to be sifted from Mrs. Gulp's chaff came simply to this: She had seen, "with her own eyes"—a detail on which she laid much stress—a number of crisp and rustling bank-notes change hands, passing from the possession of Sir Frederick into that of Miss Davis. If ever she saw hush-money paid and received, she saw it then. Sir Frederick had come no more, nor had he written. To this Maria could swear with a clear conscience, for, as she blushingly admitted, curiosity had prompted her to take "a peep" at her lodgers' very scanty correspondence. Perhaps Messrs. Flint and Starkey, whose avocations often led them into the basements of the great, were aware of the wide latitude to be used in construing "a peep" at some one else's letters, and knew nearly as much as did Lady Diddleham's former maid, as to bread-seals and the softening effects of steam, and the other treacherous traditions of servants

whose scruples are few. But that both Violet Maybrook and Lady Livingston had written, the one to "Miss Davis," and the other to "Miss Larpent, care of Miss Davis," Mrs. Gulp was certain. That the young teacher of music had gone repeatedly to Richmond to give lessons at the Fountains, was no secret. That the brother, never addressed by his sister otherwise than by the name of "Bruce," had abruptly departed, without good and sufficient cause, and that Maria would wager her existence that the elf was no more entitled to the name of Davis than to that of Montmorency or Bourbon, summed up what Mrs. Gulp could impart.

But when the detectives began to deal with the elf herself, superintendent and sergeant were compelled to admit that they had met with their match in a young woman so self-possessed, cool, and fearless. They could not, with all their conversational arts, elicit from the little girl from Canada one

statement that could be employed against her. Yes; she came from Canada. Yes; her name, which, for family reasons, had been shelved in favour of that which had belonged to her mother, was Larpent. Both these facts, discovered by contemptible means, signified nothing, she boldly declared to British justice. Of her history beyond seas, she would tell nothing, and this because she did not choose to gratify vulgar inquisitiveness. She was not her brother's keeper. Did she know his address, she was not bound to furnish it, but she did not know it. He had not explained to her his motives for suddenly leaving London. So far as she knew, he had been intrusted with some mission on behalf of Mr. Good-eve. He had hinted as much. He was not so communicative with her as had once been the case. He was often absent from home, and might have associates of whom she knew, for good or evil, nothing. Her brother found himself dull and lonely in

London, and his work was monotonous, and the confinement irksome.

For the rest, the girl held her ground boldly. Whatever she may have known or guessed as to Bruce Larpent, his hiding-place, or his actions, she was too firm to be scared or wheedled into revelations. She had done nothing, she said, nor, to her knowledge, had her brother, contrary to law. Leave the lodgings! Certainly not, until the expiration of her term. Besides, where should she go? She would stay, till Bruce came back again. In the meantime, Aphrodite warned sergeant and superintendent to be careful as to what they did. If they caused her annoyance, she should appeal to the police, or to a magistrate. Now, there is nothing which the police, acting unofficially, so much dislike as an official appeal to the police to put a stop to what is easily made to look like persecution, unless it be an application to one of those stipendiary cadis who exercise sum-


---

mary jurisdiction in the metropolis. Wherefore, the matter lay much in the hands of Mrs. Gulp the landlady, who now made her daily report of all that she could discover concerning her lodger.

“The will! the garroting! the baronet’s bank flimsies!—all hanks of the same hemp, I reckon,” said Superintendent Starkey as he plodded on.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HEIR-AT-LAW.

HERE is in all countries a brief and anxious interregnum between the death of one sovereign and the recognition of another. When the herald breaks his wand, and the biggest bells in minster towers shake the air with solemn tolling, the new monarch, in very much the plight of a freshly-hatched birdling not quite extricated from the shell, passes some hours of discomfort. It is all very well for a few great officers of state to hurry panting into their prince's presence, and to vie with one another in their eager bestowal of

the title of Majesty. But for awhile these fire-new honours are but awkwardly worn. Lord Chamberlains, Palace Marshals, and Bishops, high dignitaries as they are, do not constitute a people. The huzzas of the streets, the salvoes of cannon, the sea of bared heads, the waving handkerchiefs in casement and balcony, the deep roar of the populace, the more decorous salutations of the notables of the realm, all these are needed before the new ruler feels at home in his royal saddle. As with a kingdom, so with an estate, and especially when the right to its fee-simple is liable at any instant to be disputed or denied.

John Fleming, Lady Livingston's heir-at-law, had been duly notified of the singular accident by which he found himself the successor of a relative between whom and himself there had been scanty sympathy, and had lost no time in hastening from Lincolnshire to London to attend to his own interests. He had indeed, as people averred,

been engrossed in that occupation through life, and was one of those men whom nobody loves, and who probably fare worse in the general estimation than hundreds who are worse than they. He had steered his course, ever and always, by the beacon-light of strict legality, taking little heed of that immense unwritten jurisprudence of custom and tradition that with us in England so often override the dry letter of the law. We have heard Mrs. Hart, the housekeeper, describe him as "a covetous, creeping creature," and although servants are apt to exaggerate our salient points, the verbal caricatures which they draw are often speaking portraits. A parsimonious gentleman was John Fleming, one who never, if he could help it, gave away a shilling, and who strove very hard to beat out every sixpence of his expenditure into a ninepenny power of purchasing. His income, mainly derived from land, was but a moderate one, yet he saved each year a



satisfactory margin in ready cash. Perhaps no landowner in the county was more cordially detested by his tenantry. Those who tilled his small farms, rackrented, and let at yearly tenure, and the more dependent class that dwelt in the rows of cottages which he had built beside the fen-road, abhorred their prudent landlord more than they would have done some reckless spendthrift who drew all he could out of the shire for metropolitan consumption. "Sentimental considerations," such was his favourite phrase, "ought not to interfere with what was really a purely commercial transaction;" and accordingly it fared ill with those who were behindhand with the world, worse with the fever-stricken wretches who asked "Squire Fleming" to banish ague and typhus from their damp and malarious abodes. It was but a Liliputian property in that province of many-acred magnates, but its proprietor squeezed the sponge hard, and made the most of it.

It might, at first sight, have appeared as if John Fleming, being a bachelor who saved for the sake of saving, and who was self-denying in his habits, would scarcely have appreciated the windfall which had come in his way. Assuredly, the notion that he might succeed to Heavitree had very rarely crossed his mind. To whomsoever old Lady Livingston might bequeath her Warwickshire lands, it was certain that her cousin John, of Pinchbeck Priory, *co.* Lincoln, would not be the lucky legatee. He had arrived at a time of life when the character is formed, and was not likely to prove more indulgent to himself or others because eight or nine thousand a year had suddenly dropped into his lap. "He'll make no difference, I'll go bail," had been the comment of his old cook, when the purport of "master's" journey to London had become the talk of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, no young heir of many wants and wishes could, in the heyday of hot-

blooded youth, be more hungry for an inheritance than was this cold, frugal, elderly expectant, whose meagre face and trim gray whiskers were soon familiar sights at Richmond.

He—John Fleming, lord of Pinchbeck—was very busy. He haunted Bedford Row, sending in his card perpetually to Mr. Glegg, and waiting with meek determination, among the clerks, until the eminent family solicitor was at liberty to see him. He had his own lawyers, of a very different stamp to that of Goodeve and Glegg, Messrs. Ferret and Pounce, of Thavies Inn, but though they were active in the matter, their activity was subdued by the caution of their principal. Hard men are not always hard with the useful attorneys who attend to their foreclosures and draw their covenants. Mr. Fleming was so. Never a six-and-eightpence went into the bill of costs without his full knowledge and consent. He kept his legal

hounds lean and fit to run, and never forgot to impress on them the advantage of having in him, despite his rigid economy, at least *one* respectable client, good to brag of among smaller fry. The one thing which John Fleming dreaded was, that Beatrice should go to law with him in defence of her rights under Lady Livingston's missing will. He should win—yes, of course he should win—but then the glorious uncertainty and delays of the law, and the fearful costs of court and costs in the cause, and Ferret and Pounce with their swingeing bill, scared him. The newspapers would get hold of him too, and he was averse to have the lurid glare of the “Lime-light” leading articles turned on him and his quiet, prim, blood-sucking ways. Something sensational would be made out of the well-born usurer from the Eastern Counties, coming up to assert his extreme claims against a girl, who would have on her side the sympathies of the very judges

who ruled against her ; and as for costs as against poor Beatrice, why, Ferret and Pounce could hardly find the wearer of a wig brazen-faced enough to ask for them.

Mr. John Fleming, then, was very urbane to Beatrice his cousin, when he came down to Richmond. He took out his handkerchief, and snivelled, when he spoke to the tearful girl of her good friend departed. Lady Livingston, he said, had never quite understood him ; he regretted it, but so it was ; not but that he had always strongly desired that concord and amity should reign between his unworthy self and one so noble and excellent as was the dowager. Her property had now devolved on himself, her natural and nearest heir. But he begged, he did earnestly beg, that Miss Beatrice Fleming would consider herself, for the present, as much at home at the Fountains as during the lifetime of her benefactress. Pray, let her take her own time, and consult her own convenience,

as to her plans and her future place of residence ! His only wish was to lighten, so far as he could, the affliction under which she, very naturally, suffered. Perhaps she would think the matter over. Till she had come to a decision, by all means let her consider the house as hers.

The heir-at-law was more peremptory, although scarcely less soft-spoken, in his intercourse with the dowager's old servants. He had not, as yet, taken out letters of administration, and could not exercise full power in the mansion. But he was a thorn in the domestics' flesh, and a vexation to their spirits. The butler had a bad time of it over the cellar-book, finding himself, for the first time since he drew corks, confronted by an authority who boggled over every gap in the bins, who was incredulous as to the drafts on the contents of the sherry-crypt, and who instituted cold-blooded calculations as to the time in which ale-casks should be emptied, and as to the number

of bottles laid down from a pipe of claret. "Mr. John" pored over the accounts, disallowing, by anticipation, many an item. He gave provisional warning to every one; docked the fat horses of their oats; put the servants on board wages; and gave it clearly to be understood that all would be paid up to the day of legal notice, but that pensions and gratuities were wholly beside the mark.

Sadly changed was the hospitable mansion in those days. The ghost of the nabob, flitting about the house that he had planned to build for years and years, among the sweltering heats on the yellow Indian plains, must have been doubly discontented to behold the alteration. It was as if the life-blood of the place was congealed by the chill touch of frost. The Fountains, from which the house took its name, no longer spouted into the air their glancing columns and clouds of sparkling spray. John Fleming had "spoken" to the water

company. No more did the gas-lamps in the lodge-gates and carriage-drive burn brightly at eve. Almost every ounce of the massive silver-plate had been locked up in cupboards, under the seal of Ferret and Pounce. The cellar was locked too. No gardeners worked in the grounds. The old carriage-horses vainly pricked up their ears, and whinnied deprecatingly when some one approached the empty corn-chest. Men in rusty black went from room to room, cataloguing, with noisy pencils, in metallic note-books, every saleable scrap of portable property. Never a basin of soup, never a scuttle of coals, never a weekly half-crown, nor a bunch of grapes, went to even the poorest, or the most ailing, or the most aged of kind Lady Livingston's army of pensioners. The footmen had brushed the powder out of their ambrosial hair, and merely wore their livery to save wear-and-tear to their private suits of mufti.

Very sad was the life which Beatrice



now led, and the continued residence at the Fountains would have been irksome to her, even had Mr. Fleming's polite anxiety to get rid of her been less transparent. But then there arose before the bereaved girl the ugly problem—whither should she go? Poor as she was now, with some pitiful 'seventy pounds a year of her own, what could she do? Her reliance upon her late dear friend had been absolute; and now she found herself almost literally without shelter. Beatrice had not been accustomed to pass the whole of her time, certainly, beneath the dowager's roof; but she was now to learn the bitter lessons of actual misfortune, and to find for how much she had been indebted to the goodwill of her who was gone. No invitations reached her now. Of old they had been plenty. Not, let me hasten to say, that Miss Fleming's acquaintances, like some ruined gamester's friends in an eighteenth-century comedy, turned their backs on her

in her adversity. The wearers of purple and fine linen are not devoid of hearts, only a little thoughtless, by reason of their being lapped warmly from rough blasts of evil fortune. Had it not been "the season," Beatrice might have had the eight months' run of a dozen country houses. But nobody wants visitors in London. Wherefore, her Grace of Snowdon, and twenty other ladies belonging to that social pyramid of which Snowdon's duchess was the apex, penned very kind notes to Miss Fleming, but did not ask her to come to them in Belgravia. The Hon. and Rev. Augustus Fleming and his wife, struggling people, who could ill afford the rent of their house and the jobmaster's charge for their horses, had been used to receive Beatrice for a few weeks during the summer carnival of London, and to take her with them into "society," at the dowager's request. But the dowager's request had been backed by the dowager's cheque-

book; and now that Lady Livingston's purse could no longer be made available, the Hon. and Rev. Augustus, and his painstaking spouse, and his two rawboned girls, made no sign as of giving houseroom to their orphan cousin.

Yes, she must go forth from her old home; but whither? She almost envied Violet Maybrook, who was of course to go too, but whose strong and self-reliant nature fitted her by far the best of those two for taking an active share in life's battle. Violet was accomplished and well instructed, and with the recommendation of Mrs. General Buckram and the other lady-fossils of Hampton Court, could not long be without an engagement as governess or companion. With Beatrice the case was widely different. There are young women, as there are young men, of whom we feel assured that, in case of pecuniary mishap, they will fall, somehow, on their feet. There are others for whom we predicate the

worst ills of poverty, shorn lambs all too tender for the bleak hillside.

"I don't think, if I tried to be a governess, that any one would have me," Beatrice had said, more than once, since she had realized what her prospects really were. And, indeed, she was but a luckless outsider in that race in which highly certificated teachers, elaborately trained for the profession, demure Minervas reared at colleges, and steeped in ologies to the very rims of their blue spectacles, enter for the hundred guinea Nursery Stakes.

Towards Beatrice, the respect and the affection of the angry servants remained unwavering. Mutineers as they were in their demeanour towards the hateful heir-at-law, and chronic as was their grumbling at the stinted housekeeping, they waited on the adopted daughter of their generous old mistress with a zeal that was to the credit of human nature. Sorely disappointed as they were that the dowager's presumed

intestacy cut them off from their legitimate hopes of pay and pension, they were reverent and tender in their mention of the dead. And it is a fact that they were more perturbed at Miss Fleming's being "kep' out" of what they firmly believed to be her rights, than at the loss of that annual gift on which some of them, grown frail in service, looked as to a crutch for decrepit age. Mr. Glegg, who now "acted," as he called it, for Beatrice, came down once and again to see her; and it may have been due to the bold front which he presented to the common enemy, that John Fleming's hints regarding the propriety of his kinswoman's departure were not more pressing. He was sorry for her, and said so. Mr. Glegg even offered, at his own costs and charges, to commence proceedings in a court of law, the result of which would be to postpone for months Mr. Fleming's assumption of an owner's claims over the heritage.

"Of course, my dear young lady, it's

only a question of time," the lawyer had said; "he must beat us in the long run; but we can traverse every plea, and with counter-affidavits, and a demurrer to the main issue, can throw the thing into a future term; ay, and cost the mean hound a trifle of his darling money too."


But of this, though grateful to Mr. Glegg for his championship, Beatrice would not hear. There was no will forthcoming, nor would she avail herself of any legal chicanery to hamper the wheels of Mr. John Fleming's triumphal chariot.

Yet her mind must be made up, and that speedily. The old ladies at Hampton Court, Mrs. General Buckram and the rest, would have shared their crust with her, say for a fortnight apiece; and Mr. Glegg did induce his buxom red-faced wife to write to Miss Fleming, asking her to spend a month at the "Lodge;" but she was in no mood for a peripatetic existence of this sort, and all these well-meant offers were thank-

fully declined. Dashwood's sullen silence remained unbroken. Even Oswald Charlton, who had once visited the Fountains since the memorable occasion of the funeral, now seemed, so Beatrice thought, to have forgotten her. Well, well! It was better, perhaps, that it should be so. No happiness could accrue from any renewal of their former intimacy. She was still bound by her promise to Dashwood, and even were that barrier no longer in existence, she could not expect her former lover to sacrifice his ease and his prospects for the sake of taking to his home a penniless bride. Yet it was with joy that she at length received a letter from Oswald, announcing that he should be at Richmond on the morrow, and expressing a strong desire for some conversation with her. She wrote her answer, and despatched it. Worldly prudence, self-depreciation, were forgotten. She should see him, at any rate, once again.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TWO FAIR OFFERS.

“ LADY, miss, wishing to see you, please!” said a voice, the owner of which wore a cap, trimmed for the nonce with black ribbons, and a spotless apron over a frock of that peculiar-like print which seems to be manufactured expressly for the wear of the English female servants.

“A lady? What lady?” asked Violet wearily. She was growing very weary, in these latter days, of the world, not, indeed, with the thorough weariness that weighs down the old and the worn-out, but to as



great an extent as was compatible with her youth.

"I think, miss, it is her as came down, formerly, to give the music-lessons," answered the girl, who was a raw, new under-housemaid, one of the recruits who from time to time were sent up from the Heavietree estate to be drilled and taught by Mrs. Hart the housekeeper.

"Miss Larpent? Certainly, I will see her," said Violet, after a moment's reflection: "in the library, Susan, if you will say so."

But the girl shook her beribboned head. "Those lawyer gentlemen are a-writing there, miss," she said: "he as they call Ferret, and acts up to it, poking about with his ugly face all over the house; and a clerk of his; and Brickman the auctioneer. And Mr. John—though he be no master o' mine, for all he orders and nags—is writing in the blue drawing-room along

with t' other 'torney. But there's no one in the dining-room just now."

Wherefore, Violet Maybrook gave audience to the companion of her infancy, Aphy Larpent, in the great room where the nabob's feasts had been spread in the old days of hard drinking and heavy feeding, and where of late the mourners at Lady Livingston's funeral had assembled. To witness the meeting, it might have been thought that the two had exchanged characters; for Violet's rare beauty and stately presence were clouded by the lassitude which had of late crept over her, whereas the elf's eyes sparkled as with the hidden fires that glow beneath the surface of the opal, and her gliding movements were quicker and more assured than was usual with her.

"Your hand burns, Vi, like fire: you are not ill?" asked the young music-mistress as she touched the palm which Miss Maybrook mechanically laid within her grasp.

"Ill! No; I'm well enough," answered Violet, with indifference.

Was she one to complain, and to such a one as the false creature before her, of the long, long watches of the night, spent in sleepless feverish unrest, of the haunting past, the brooding future, the intolerable present, the weight of care, of rage, and of regret, which are for those who do wrong on earth what were the fabled Eumenides of old Greece! Nor, in very truth, was she ill. These rich natures, full of life, fraught with a potency of enjoyment or of suffering, can bear a very great strain before the chain snaps.

"You did not come here, old friend, to inquire as to my health, did you? I must wait until it pleases you to explain what you would have of me," she added coldly, as she signed to her visitor to be seated.

"Upon my word, your reception is not a very encouraging one, and some people would take huff, and go as they came,"

returned the elf, with her hard mocking little laugh; "but we have known one another a very long time, and are privileged. I merely ran down to-day, my dear, to say how glad I should be, as, of course, you cannot stay in these diggings—can you?—if you would come to me. I'm lonely since Bruce went, as you may guess; so it is half selfish, after all, is my errand."

"Half selfish!" Violet repeated those words, unconscious that she did so, and tried, with some success, to shake off the languor that dulled her usually clear brain. When had she known, since the early days of dolls and sweetmeats, Aphrodite Larpent to be actuated by any motive that could not be directly traced to some mean impulse? But what, in this instance, could be her object? That was not so plain. "You know, I suppose, Aphy, that I have but my small savings, and shall be very poor," said Violet at length.

"Poor; and so am I," answered the

other promptly : "but then two women can live on what a man would fling away on cabs and cigars. There is Bruce's old room at your service. You and I will live as frugally as a couple of country mice that have strayed into this great splendid capital of London, to make money if we can, not to waste it. I shall teach music to any one who will be good enough to patronize me ; and you will give morning lessons to pupils, I dare say, until you can hear of something better. If I were to say how pleased I should be to set up housekeeping with a very old friend like yourself, you wouldn't believe me. And yet, Vi, dear, it is true."

This was very well said, well and naturally, and it would probably have obtained credence from nine men out of ten. But one woman does not see another through the illusory haze of sentimental preference which dims the perception of either sex where the other is concerned. Violet Maybrook was not one fraction

nearer to putting trust in the disinterested affection of her early playmate than she had been before Aphrodite's pretty speech was so prettily spoken. But, after a moment's thought, she decided within herself what her answer should be. What possible harm, after all, could such neighbourhood do to her? The hold which Aphy had upon her would be as efficacious for harm, perhaps more so, at a distance than when they two should be together. And the instinct that had formerly made her shrink from Bruce's sister had gradually become very much weakened.

"Come—it's a fair offer," said Aphrodite, who watched her narrowly.

"And I accept it, Aphy," returned Violet, slowly; "accept it, I am sure, in the spirit in which it is made." As she spoke, a figure passed the window towards which her face was turned. She started. "Mr. Charlton again!" she said; "I thought he would come no more. People, except birds

of ill omen, like the busy instruments of the new owner who now pervade the house, seem to keep very much aloof from the Fountains now. Yet it was Lord Livingston's nephew, I am certain."

Oswald Charlton it was whose figure had in passing the window attracted the notice of Miss Maybrook, and we may as well follow him to the small yellow drawing-room, which had been the dowager's favourite apartment during the winter months. The rest of the house was delivered over to an incursion of Goths from Thavies Inn, and of Vandals from the auction-mart, cataloguing, appraising, inspecting, whatsoever might appear likely to bring a good price by public competition. But the yellow drawing-room had been one of the earliest rooms to be subjected to this invasion of "Mr. John's" satellites, and there Beatrice Fleming was able to receive Oswald without much prospect of their conversation being interrupted by the

rush of greasy Hebrews with patent pencils and bulging pocket-books.

"I am very glad that you could see me to-day," said Oswald, making up his mind to break the somewhat awkward silence that prevailed after the first commonplace words of greeting had been said; "and the more so because, as I suppose, you will not remain here, now, very long."

"It was very kind of you—to—to think of me," returned Beatrice, shyly; and, in spite of herself, her lip trembled a very little, and there were tears in her eyes. Up to that moment, there had been between these two young persons an embarrassing consciousness of the restraint of their present position. True-lovers, forbidden any longer to speak on the topic of love, are wretched conversationists, each knowing that from his or her lips mere platitudes sound doubly trite. But now, as he noted the suppressed signs of the emotion which Beatrice could not quite



hide, he found his tongue at last, and spoke out boldly enough.

“To think of you!” he exclaimed. “When do I not think of the prize I hoped to win, and lost, of what I loved so dearly, but that was beyond my reach! Do not be alarmed, I beg of you,” he added, more gently, as he saw that Beatrice was startled by his vehemence; “I did not come to disturb your grief by dwelling on my own selfish sorrows. But remember that I never promised not to love you, dearest—that would have been beyond my power. What I really did engage to do was, to keep aloof, and that I have done. I should not have been here to-day, were it not for the great and sudden loss which you have had to bear, and to which ought not to be added that lesser loss, the deprivation of what is justly yours.”

“Nothing is mine,” said Beatrice, with an unsuccessful attempt to smile, “nothing now. I never knew how rich I was until I

found myself alone in the world. But, indeed, it is not the money that I regret."

"No; it is natural," answered Oswald, "that while the smart of your recent grief is still fresh, your thoughts should dwell solely on the memory of her whom you have lost. Young as you are, and free, hitherto, from sordid thoughts and cares, mere poverty seems dwarfed by the anguish that has gone before. And yet, believe me, many as are the temptations that enervate the rich, it is not always well to be poor. There are natures that grow sour and hard in adversity, and others, of a more gentle stamp, that fade and wither in an uncongenial atmosphere of anxiety and want. It is no light thing for you, young, well nurtured, and delicate, to be flung thus unprotected among strangers; for, so far as I know, your own resources must be indeed small."

"How can I help that?" said Beatrice, this time smiling through her tears. "I

mean to be very brave, and to make myself useful, if I can. I have something of my own, a little, and perhaps, if I am not thought clever enough to teach, I might still do something to eke it out. I can draw and paint, not very well, I dare say, but I should be contented with very humble gains. And I do not want very much."

Oswald Charlton shook his head very sadly. "You scarcely know, I fear," he said, "what difficulties await the poor lady who tries to turn her accomplishments into bread-winning arts. I have seen, unfortunately, only too much of these experiments: the pretty sketches sold for what barely paid the cost of colours and Bristol-board; the dainty lace, over which its maker had half-blinded herself, purchased at a price so low that its offer appeared an insult; the illuminated book, the gay embroidery, vainly hawked from shop to shop. All honour to those who try to work, and to live by work, in the hour of affliction,

but the market for such wares as these is terribly overstocked. But I did not come to prove myself a croaking prophet of evil," he added, more cheerfully; "I came to say that I have turned the matter of the disappearance of the will over in my head, and am quite convinced that it is in existence, and that it is in the hands of this Davis, or Larpent, or whatever the man's real name may be."

"But Mr. Glegg was certain it had been—destroyed," pleaded Beatrice; "and I think so too. Had it been in the house here, it must have been found."

"Mr. Glegg," answered Charlton, "though a shrewd solicitor, is not infallible, and the less so, because his habitual turn of thought disposes him to accept the most ordinary and prosaic solution of every one of those riddles which life presents us. And even he was staggered, and admitted himself to be so, by some of the arguments which I advanced when we yesterday discussed the question. I need not weary you with my

reasons. I have only come to say that I will spare no toil, no trouble, no cost, within the limits of a poor man's purse, to bring that missing will to light, and to right the cruel wrong under which I firmly believe you to be suffering."

"But your profession, your prospects——"  
Beatrice began; but the young man, half-playfully, cut short her expostulation.

"My profession, as you are aware," he said, "is not my sole means of support. And as regards my prospects, why, I am young enough to afford to be put back, as it were, for a space in the race of life, and to allow myself to be outstripped by my juniors of a year or so. I must work doubly hard, later on, to make up for lost time. But of one thing I am resolved: Heavitree Hall and its acres, and the rest of the property, shall go to the true owner. And the true owner is not Mr. John Fleming. The will exists. It has been stolen. And I will find it, and reinstate my good

aunt's lawful heiress in the position that is justly hers."

"But granting that you prove successful," rejoined Beatrice, timidly, "have you considered the results of your very success? I should be still bound, still betrothed, to Frederick Dashwood. Nor is it in his nature not to claim a rich wife. He would come to demand the fulfilment of the pledge, and I could not gainsay him. Would it not be better, far better, to let the property go, and to leave me quiet in my obscurity?"

The young barrister rose from his chair, walked to the window, and stood gazing out for some moments. And yet he did not see the driving cloud-rack, nor the rose-trees in their wealth of bloom, nor the green of the tall grass that flourished, unmown, on the once trim lawn. Might it not be true that in seeking the restoration of Beatrice Fleming's rights, he was really working for the man to whom he felt so

rooted an aversion, for Sir Frederick Dashwood! No doubt but that the mercenary baronet would be deterred by no scruples from claiming Beatrice as his bride. To recover the fortune which, by fraud or accident, had been lost, was to condemn the girl he loved to a life of wedded misery. His own chance, too, poor and feeble as it was, would then be utterly extinguished.

But there was too much nobility of soul in Oswald Charlton to permit him to weigh his own hopes, his own longings, in the scales wherein he sought to strike the balance of Beatrice Fleming's welfare. He had no security that, even now, Dashwood might not persist in his design. And the idea of that tender girl as the ill-treated wife of a needy and fierce profligate, as the victim of his savage or sullen humours, and a target for the insolence of incensed creditors, all but maddened him. Better than such a lot as that would be gilded chains, such as polite Hymen occasionally forges

for civilized wear. Should the property be recovered, and should the baronet prove intractable, it would be easy for judicious friends to prepare such settlements as should render Miss Fleming's fortune-hunting cousin dependent on his wife's good-will for the supplies which his extravagance required. This was but a dismal form of relief, but it was better than the too probable alternative. It would be very bad that Beatrice should become a governess, exposed, it might be, to the caprice or tyranny of purse-proud employers. It would be worse to contemplate her becoming the nominal mistress of a bankrupt establishment, and the joyless slave of a bad husband. He thought over all these things, and his mind was made up.

"Come what may, dear Beatrice," he said, aloud, "I will loyally do my duty by you. Consider what my poor aunt would feel, did she know that that precious kinsman of hers, now engaged in calculating



the utmost profit that he can make by selling to the highest bidder every object that was to her as a dumb friend, was able to turn her chosen heiress out of the mansion that is hers of right! The wishes of the dead should be held sacred, surely, in this case, as in others. Lady Livingston's intentions on your behalf were matter of public notoriety, nor ought they to be frustrated, while I, at any rate, have health and strength to carry them out.—What is that?"

For at that instant there was a tap at the door, and the old butler, who had committed the solecism of knocking, came gliding into the room, with his impassable face and noiseless tread, bearing, on a salver chased with the Livingston arms and coronet, a letter with a deep black edge. Long after the old servant had withdrawn, Beatrice remained with this letter in her hand, unopened, as if she feared to break the seal. When she did do so, she read as follows :

“DEAR COUSIN,—I never wrote to you before, nor have we ever met, so that the face, and the handwriting, and the very name, perhaps, of your present correspondent are likely to be equally unfamiliar to you. The signature of Catherine Dashwood might not at once introduce me as what I am, the widow of Philip Dashwood. My poor husband, you may have heard, was the eldest son of old Sir George, and would have been now the baronet, but for his early death in Canada. You may possibly have heard something of my story, and of the loss of my dear little boy, a year since, by drowning. He was all I had left in the world, and I am a desolate, heart-broken woman, and, I am afraid, but dull company. I mention this, not to parade my own sorrows, which are, after all, of a character every day to be met with, but to prepare you for a very quiet and uneventful routine of life, should you accept my invitation. And now for the invitation

itself. Had you been, as was at first supposed, the wealthy and envied heiress of my old friend, Lady Livingston, I should not have cast the black shadow of my mourning across your joyous and prosperous young life. As it is, grief naturally feels a fellowship with grief, and in the belief that you are now for the moment without a home, I write to ask you to share mine. To come to me will be to confer, not to incur, an obligation. Although far from being rich, I am fairly well provided with worldly goods, and, excepting some old relations who had grown almost to forget me during the years I spent out of England, I have none to love me. It should not be my fault if I did not earn some little liking on your part.

“We are, as you know, connected by affinity, if not by blood, and I have received old kindness from some of your race and name, which may, I trust, serve as an excuse for the liberty which I, a stranger, presume to take. I make you my offer,

such as it is, frankly and freely, not disguising from myself, or from you, that life beneath my roof may prove to one like yourself to be monotonous and melancholy. I own that I should be sadly disappointed should you refuse me, and yet I am not selfish enough to regret it, should your refusal be prompted by the fact that brighter prospects lie before you, and that I have been misinformed. And remember that if you decide on coming to me here, you remain free as air, to stay, or to leave me when you will, in the very probable case of your becoming tired of me, although, if you are what I remember you in childhood—you have forgotten, of course, seeing Mrs. Philip Dashwood, on her only visit to her native country for long years—I should not easily grow tired of you. Your room—you see I have taken possession of you by anticipation—is ready, and at any rate there is nothing gloomy about it, or about the externals of the house, whatever its mistress

may be. From your windows, through the screen of the rose-creepers, and between the trees, you can see the blue waves breaking in a long line of foam on the sunny beach. If you will come at once to occupy it, you will greatly please your sincere well-wisher and friend,

“CATHERINE DASHWOOD.”

This was all, with the exception of a postscript sending a kind message of remembrance to Miss Maybrook, and of the date and address. The latter was that of Whitborne, one of the prettiest and least frequented watering-places on the south coast.

“I never,” said Oswald, as he folded and laid down the letter, which Beatrice, having first read its contents, had handed to him for perusal, “heard anything but good of this Mrs. Philip Dashwood. Sorrow, at all events, has not made her selfish. But as regards this offer of hers——”

"I shall accept it," answered Beatrice, whose eyes were again swimming in tears. "I have not so many friends left to me, that I can afford to reject the kind hand held out to me in the very moment when I seem most to need it. Yes, I will go; and, if she will let me, we shall be very dear friends. I am sure I shall not feel myself a stranger there. And it is time that I should go, for this dear, dear old house is no longer a home for me, and I am daily made to know that I am a trespasser here."

"Not for long, however," said Oswald Charlton, affecting a cheery confidence which he was far from experiencing, as he rose to say farewell. "Wrong, as the nursery saw says, will come right, be sure, one day. I wish I were as certain of being Lord Chancellor, as I am that the missing will exists, and can be traced out, if only the seeker holds to his quest tenaciously enough. Whitborne is not very far off,

too, and I shall crave Mrs. Dashwood's permission to come down, now and then, to report progress. And now, though it is hard to say it—good-bye, dear, dear Beatrice ; good-bye !" He pressed her hand in his, turned quickly away, and he was gone.

END OF VOL. II.









